

Practical reasons and rationality

A critique of the desire-based reasons model

Thesis for the degree of Master in Philosophy

Alf Andreas Bø

University of Oslo, November 2007

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor professor Olav Gjelsvik for advices and encouragements. I am grateful for the challenging and interesting discussions we had during the last year.

Thanks to my fellow students Åsmund Alvik, Simen Rommetveit Halvorsen and Kristian Rasmussen for several great philosophical discussions and nice cups of coffee. I would also like to thank PhD Håvard Løkke for advices and encouragements.

Special thanks to my parents Martha and Amund for their love, support and hospitality.

Big hugs, and special thanks to my sisters Ingvild and Ragnhild for all they have done for me, from guiding a fresh confused student on campus to their reading of an earlier manuscript of this essay. I am indebted to their comments and corrections.

Oslo, November 2007

A.A.

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Imagine not being able to distinguish the real cause from that without which the cause would not be able to act as a cause. It is what the majority appear to do, like people groping in the dark; they call it a cause, thus giving it a name that does not belong to it (Socrates in Plato: *The Phaedo* 99b).

1.1 Introduction

In this thesis I am presenting and discussing Bernard Williams's desire-based internalist theory on practical reasons and his arguments against the externalist theory on reasons (cf. section 2). I will elaborate Williams's arguments against externalism and argue that they are no threat for the externalist position presented in this essay. Williams's internalism will be contested from an externalist point of view, first of all from Derek Parfit's position (cf. section 3-5). In section 6-7 I am arguing that no reasons are provided by desires. I will argue there are good reasons to reject the internalist theory on reasons in section 9.

Philosophers have at all times discussed what kinds of reasons which do, or ought to, motivate us to act. The question can be formulated like this: When a person is acting, on what reason did this person perform this particular action and what makes the action rational? The answer to this question is not easy to find. It has been, and still is, subject for a wide ranging debate.

I have been studying different theories of reasons for some time now, and have found myself thinking within the scope of ethics as well as epistemology and metaphysics. If we could find out what is happening when we are motivated to act and then discover what kinds of reasons we do rationally act upon, then we may have a starting point in our search for theories on morality and rationality. In other words, an answer to what practical reasons are, could give us an answer on many central philosophical questions. Reasons are a central aspect of human behaviour as such and are therefore worth exploring. I will not formulate any final theory on morality or rationality in this essay: I will rather focus on two different theories on practical reasons.

In contemporary philosophy there are two main positions on this subject. According to established terminology, they are called the "internalist position", claiming the desire-based reasons view (in short, the "DBR-theory") and the "externalist position", claiming the value-based reasons view (in short, the VBR-theory).¹ The DBR-theory claims, roughly, that the

¹ The terminology is used by Parfit in Parfit, D, 1997, "Reasons and motivation" in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, suppl.* Vol. 71, 1997 pp. 99-130; Parfit, D, 2001, "Rationality and reasons" In Egonsson, D. et. al. (eds.), *Exploring practical philosophy, essays in honour of Ingmar Persson* (Ashgate), pp. 17-39; Parfit, D.

reasons we are acting upon are provided by our motivational states saying that motivational reasons consists of both an instrumental belief and a corresponding desire. We are acting when we believe that our doing this thing will fulfil our present motivational state. The VBR-theory holds that reasons are provided by facts about something relevantly *good*. Our reasons are provided by “valuable aspects of the world” (“facts”).² A central claim of externalism is this position’s view that value-based reasons can motivate independently of our currently motivational states.

Until recently the DBR-theory has been very influential, but it has suffered some serious attack. In this essay I will try to explain why and I will do so by discussing the non-reductive internalist model, represented by Bernard Williams.³ The internalist model will be contested from an externalist point of view. First of all from Derek Parfit’s position. I will argue that we do have reasons to prefer the externalist position rather than Williams’s internalist position. I will present Williams’s arguments against the externalist position and argue that his arguments are no threat for the externalist position presented in this essay.

I will argue in this essay that it is possible that there might be a reason for an agent to ϕ , independently of this person’s current motivations. This entails that not all reasons are provided by our motivational states. If this is true, as I will argue that it is, then Williams’s arguments against externalism fails. I will argue that *no* reasons are provided by our motivational states. If this latter bolder claim is true, then internalism of practical reasons is false.

2002, “What we could rationally will” The tanner lectures on human value; Dancy, J.2004b, *Practical reality* (Oxford University Press) Oxford; Tanyi, A.2006, *An essay on the desire-based reasons model*, A doctoral dissertation.

² “Valuable aspects of the world” are Joseph Raz’s terminology. See Raz, J. 1999, “Agency, Reason and the Good” in Raz 1999, *Engaging reason, on the theory of value and action* (Oxford University Press), Oxford, p. 22

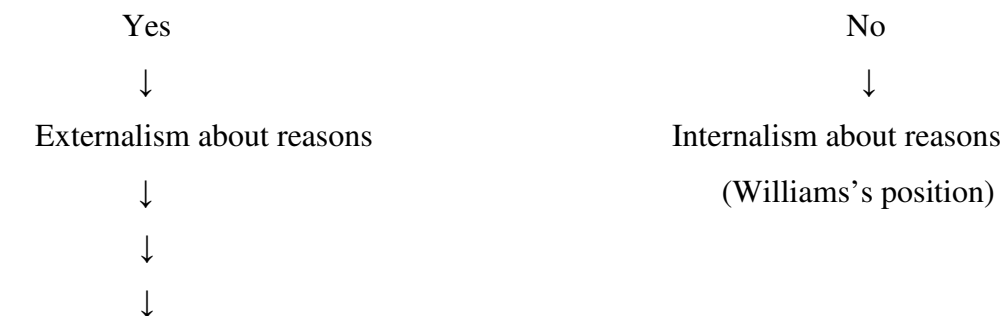
³ Williams presents his internalist position in Williams, B.1981. “Internal and external reasons” in *Moral luck, philosophical papers 1973-1980*, (Cambridge University Press), Cambridge, pp. 101-113; Williams, B. 1995, “Replies” In Altham, J.E.J and R. Harrison (eds.) 1995, *World, Mind, and ethics Essays on the ethical philosophy of Bernard Williams* (Cambridge University Press), Cambridge, pp.185-224; Williams, B.2000 “Internal reasons and the obscurity of blame” in *Making sense of humanity and other philosophical papers 1982-1993* 2nd edition, (Cambridge University Press) Cambridge, pp. 35-45; Williams, B.2001. “Postscript, some further notes on Internal and External Reasons” in Millgram, E. (ed.) 2001, *Varieties of practical reasoning* (A Bradford book, The MIT Press), Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, pp. 91-97.

1.2 The map

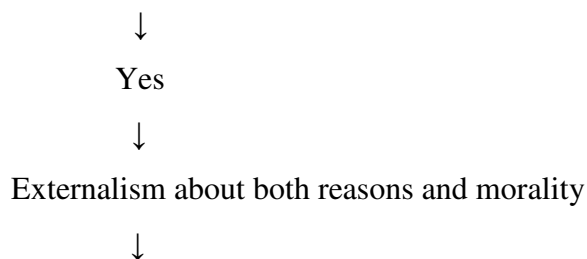
On the following pages the two positions in debate will be presented. I think a map over the different views will be useful, so I will present a simplified version of Parfit's detailed map over several views and theories.⁴ According to Parfit, the truth of the sentence, "M", is according to the internalists, sufficient for an agent having a reason:

(M) if we knew the relevant facts, and deliberated rationally, we would be motivated to do this thing.⁵

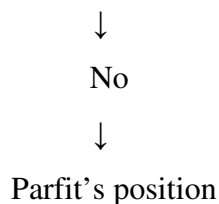
Question 1: Could we have a reason to act in some way, even if (M) were not true?



Question 2: Could we have a duty to act in some way, even if (M) were not true?



Question 3: Could we have a duty to act in some way, without having a reason to do so?



⁴ Parfit 1997, "Reason and Motivation", p. 103

⁵ Parfit 1997: 100

I will focus on the first question in this essay. One of Williams's main issues is to prevent the externalist answer "yes" to the first question, but my discussion will show that Williams's arguments do not succeed in blocking the VBR-theory of external reasons.

There have been three main objections to Williams's internalism.⁶ Christine Korsgaard argued that the Kantian theory is not eliminated by Williams's argument.⁷ Since Kant was no externalist, this objection is not relevant for the purpose of this paper. Goldstein, Millgram and Scanlon do all present arguments concerning an "insensitive agent".⁸ The insensitive agent fails to act upon his motivational reasons; despite he seems to satisfy Williams's requirements for having a reason and being rational. This argument will be presented in section 3.2. I will argue that the arguments concerning the insensitive agent do succeed in questioning some central aspects of the DBR-theory, but I will also claim that Williams's position is not very affected by this argument. Another attempt is the neo-Aristotelian objections presented by several philosophers claiming the value-based reason-view. It will, I think, be anachronistic to involve Aristotle's theory in this debate. Although, it is clear that several of the contemporary philosopher's who argues in these lines are influenced by Aristotle's thoughts.⁹ I will focus on this latter objection to Williams in this essay.

⁶ See Williams 1995, "Replies"; Jenkins, M.P. 2006, *Bernard Williams* (Acumen Publishing Limited), Chesham, p. 105

⁷ Korsgaard, C.1986, "Scepticism about practical reason" In *The journal of philosophy*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (Jan. 1986), pp. 5-25

⁸ Goldstein, P.2001. "An argument against Williams' Internalism", In *Logos* Fall 2004 pp. 61-81. Millgram, E.1996. "Williams' Argument against External Reasons" In *Nous* Vol. 30, No. 2. (Jun., 1996), pp. 197-220. Scanlon, T.M.2000. "Williams on Internal and External Reasons" in *What we owe to each other* (The Belknap press of Harvard University press), Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, pp. 363-373

⁹ Warren Quinn is the only philosopher I am referring to in this essay who explicitly says that he is "presupposing something of an Aristotelian perspective" when discussing internalism. Quinn, W. 1993b, "Rationality and the human good" in *Morality and action* (Cambridge University Press) Cambridge, pp. 210-220, at p. 210. In section 7.4 I will demonstrate that Parfit and Scanlon also have some sort of an Aristotelian position on their view when presenting their view on the "object of our desires".

2. Bernard Williams

2.1 Internal and external reasons

In his influential paper “Internal and External reasons” Williams set the standard for the discussion between the advocates of the internalist DBR-theory and the externalist VBR-theory.¹⁰

Williams elaborates two possible interpretations of the sentences “A has a reason to ϕ ” or “there is a reason for A to ϕ ”. “A” refers to an agent and “ ϕ ” refers to any verb of action. The sentences have, according to Williams, these two interpretations:

A has some motive that will be served or furthered by his ϕ -ing, and if this turns out not to be so the sentence is false: there is a condition relating to the agent’s aims, and if this is not satisfied it is not true on this interpretation, that he has a reason to ϕ . On the second interpretation, there is no such condition, and the reason-sentence will not be falsified by the absence of an appropriate motive. I shall call the first the “internal”, the second the “external”, interpretation.¹¹

Several philosophers have discussed the interpretations since Williams formulated this way of distinguishing the theories from each other. Williams argues, in his paper, that if there is to be true that an agent has a practical reason to ϕ , then this practical reason must contain at least one element, or property, of the agent’s “motivational set”, that he calls “S”. If not, it is not true that this person has a practical reason to ϕ . This is the internalist interpretation. This position holds that an agent is motivated to act, i.e. the agent has a motivational reason to ϕ , only if the agent has a pair of an instrumental belief and a corresponding motivational state, e.g. a desire to ϕ . Internalism holds that a belief cannot give rise to motivation all by itself, therefore our practical reasons are provided by our motivational states, usually called a *desire* in contemporary philosophical works.¹²

I will argue that this is not necessarily so. I do agree, however, with Williams that the externalist position he formulates in “Internal and External reasons” is not a plausible view, but I do not agree that the externalists have not succeeded in describing an adequate theory. What the term “external reason” means is often vague in the literature, but it seems to me that Williams is using the term “external reason” in another sense than most of the externalist

¹⁰ Williams was, to my knowledge, the first to formulate the two kinds of practical reasons in these terms.

¹¹ Williams 1981, “Internal and External Reasons”, p. 101

¹² In this essay I will use the term “desire” in this “philosophical way” when referring to motivational states.

theorists. It seems to me that the externalist theory Williams formulates, is a reductive theory. I will argue that the theory I am going to present, which in some ways but not in every aspect of it, will satisfy as an externalist theory according to Williams, is not contested by Williams's arguments against externalism.

An external reason might be explained like this: "There is a reason for A to ϕ ". This means that there is at least one good reason for A to ϕ , but it does not imply that A necessarily has a motivation to ϕ , or even is aware of ϕ . Since reasons are based on values, and not motivational states, the externalists can claim that there might be true that ϕ -ing will be a good thing for A to do, even if A has no present motivation to ϕ . This means that the externalists distinguish between "good external reasons" and "motivational reasons". This distinction between different kinds of reasons will be discussed more carefully throughout this essay.¹³

The purpose of my arguments against the DBR-theory is to show that what Williams argues provides our reasons, "S", are not really what provides our reasons. The argument against Williams's position will demonstrate that the desire-based reasons theory cannot rationally explain its own desire-based reasons. The main points of the arguments, which will be outlined later, is that desires, aims, goals and all the other elements that are to be found in Williams's motivational set, are based on reason-giving values if they are to be rational.¹⁴ This means that all the entities in the motivational set, together with a corresponding belief, do not include everything that is to be said about there being a reason for someone to act. This may imply, among many other things that we need to reject that reason is inactive, as David Hume argued. I will not discuss Hume's position in this essay; I will focus on the so-called neo-Humeans. Williams can be said to be among them. One of the similarities between Williams's and Hume's position is that Williams seems to agree with Hume's famous proposition that:

¹³ This distinction is held by several philosophers, e.g. Raz, J. 1975a, *Practical reasons and norms* (Hutchinson of London), London; Raz, J. (ed.) 1978, *Practical reasoning* (Oxford University Press) Oxford; Raz, J. 1986, *The morality of freedom* (Clarendon Press) Oxford; Raz 1999; Parfit, D. 1987, *Reasons and Persons* (Clarendon Press) Oxford; Parfit 1997; Parfit 2001; Dancy 2004b; Dancy 2004c, *Ethics without principles* (Clarendon Press) Oxford; Smith, M. 1996, *The moral problem* (Blackwell Publishers) Oxford.

¹⁴ In this point I am following several writers. See e.g. Dancy 2004b; Parfit 1997; Parfit 2001; Scanlon 2000; Raz 1975; Raz 1986; Raz 1999; Bittner, R. 2001, *Doing things for reasons* (Oxford University Press) Oxford; Quinn, W. 1993b; Quinn, W. 1993c, "Putting rationality in its place" in Quinn 1993, pp. 228-255; Cuneo, T.D. 1999, "An Externalist Solution to the "Moral Problem"" in *Philosophy and phenomenological Research*, Vol. 59, No. 2. (Jun., 1999). pp. 359-380.

Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.¹⁵

Williams does not explicitly say that he accepts this claim, but it is clear that he defends that there is the content of the agent's S that provide us with reasons for action. Reason cannot by itself give rise to motivation. It is not meant that an agent's reason is totally inactive. The slavish reason is doing something, after all slaves do work, but reason needs to be guided by motivational states for there being any motivational practical reasons present. That is, Williams's S which seems to be a neo-Humean version of Hume's "passions".

Another central difference between the internalist and the externalist positions is the relation between having performed a moral judgement and being morally motivated to act. The internalist position holds that it is a necessary connection between having performed a moral judgement and being morally motivated to act, while the externalists reject this claim. According to the externalists, there is a contingent relation between having performed a moral judgement and being morally motivated. Having performed a moral judgement does usually imply that the agent has a motivation to act. But there is a lot more to say about this relation and about there being a reason for someone to act. I will argue that the externalist rejection of the internalist "practical requirement", in Smith's terminology is plausible.¹⁶

I have already said that some aspects of the VBR-theory I am going to present and defend, do qualify as an external reasons theory after Williams's criteria. But the theory is not equivalent with the externalist statements Williams presents in his papers. The VBR-theory claims that good reasons are provided by reason-giving values ("facts"). By responding to these facts we "create" the elements of our S. Believing an end to be valuable or worthwhile to achieve, is of course a mental state, i.e. something internal, but there are external elements of value, such as the facts they are related to, i.e. object-given facts.¹⁷ The external facts provide the values of something *good* that we believe we will achieve by performing this very

¹⁵ Hume, D. 1978, *A treatise on human nature*, in the L. A. Selby-Bigge edition. Second Edition with text revised and notes by P. H. Nidditch. (Clarendon Press), Oxford, Book II, part III, section III p. 415

¹⁶ For discussions on this subject see Shafer-Landau, R. "Moral Judgement and Moral Motivation" In *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (Jul. 1998), pp. 353-358; Hurley, S.L.2001, "Reason and motivation, the wrong direction?" In *Analysis* 61:2 (April 2001), pp. 151-155; Snare, F.1975, "The argument from motivation" in *Mind*, New series, Vol. 84, No. 333 (Jan. 1975), 99.1-9; Brink, D.O.1997, "Moral Motivation" in *Ethics*, Vol. 108, No. 1. (Oct. 1997), pp. 4-32; Aronovitch, H. 1979, "Rational motivation" in *Philosophical and phenomenological Research*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Dec. 1979), pp. 173-193; Parfit 1997, Parfit 2001; Smith 1996; Williams 1981 and especially Williams 2000.

¹⁷ "Object-given" means that our values are related to the objects of our desires. "Object-given" is Parfit's terminology, Parfit 2001: 21. See also Aristotle: *De Anima* book III, chapter 10. D. W. Hamlyn's translation from 1968 has more or less the same terminology.

action. And because we believe there will be something good about performing this action, we have a reason to do this thing. By doing this thing, we will, in Parfit's words, be "substantively rational".¹⁸

Believing that we have a good reason to perform a certain action can, at the look at it, lead the VBR-theorists into what I will call "the Humean trap". The Humean trap is the problem that the values we believe we have a reason to act upon can be understood as internal reason-statements, as Williams claims.¹⁹ But believing that an action will be good or worthwhile on the VBR-theory is not equivalent with Williams's notion of believing an internal reason-statement. I will argue that the VBR-theory avoid "the Humean trap".

2.2 Williams's non-reductive internalism

When we act, we are acting upon a reason. This reason is, according to Williams, provided by a member of the agent's motivational set, "S". S may contain such things as "dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties, and various projects, as they may be abstractly called, embodying commitments of the agent".²⁰ In this section I will present Williams's non-reductive internalism and how he thinks we are rationally acting upon the content in our S.

In "Internal and external reasons" Williams begins his definition of internalism with what he calls the "sub-Humean model". The sub-Humean model claims roughly that:

a person A has a reason to ϕ iff A has some desire the satisfaction of which will be served by his ϕ -ing.
Or some desire which satisfaction A believes will be served by his ϕ -ing.²¹

The sub-Humean model is not to be understood as Hume's theory. Hume's theory is, as Williams says, more complicated than this claim. According to Williams, is this view too simple, and the reason why it is too simple, is simple too; A can have false beliefs. This is shown by Williams's gin & tonic example: A desires to have a glass of gin & tonic and believes that a certain glass contains gin. But the glass does in fact contain petroleum. Would it make sense to say that A in this situation has a reason to mix the content of the glass with

¹⁸ "To be substantively rational, we must care about certain things, such as our own well-being". Parfit 1997: 101

¹⁹ Williams 1981, "Internal and External Reasons", p. 107

²⁰ Williams 1981: 105

²¹ Williams 1981: 101-2

tonic and drink it? It will not, says Williams, because if we accept the sub-Humean model, then we will have to accept that A rationally can desire to drink petroleum on base of the false belief that it is gin. This proves, according to Williams, that the sub-Humean view is implausible, because, according to this view, there are no rational requirements on which desires one is to be acting upon. A would of course not desire to drink petroleum, if he knew that it was petroleum. Our beliefs must to be true, if we are to be able to rationally decide what to do. Instead of giving us a criterion of what there is that makes a belief true, Williams gives us some new criteria for internalism and by this he creates, in his own words, a more adequate model.

The first claim of internalism:

- (1) An internal reason statement is falsified by the absence of some appropriate element from S²²

The second claim of internalism:

- (2) A member of S, D, will not give A a reason for ϕ -ing if either the existence of D is dependent on false belief, or A's belief in the relevance of ϕ -ing to the satisfaction of D is false²³

And from this he draws the epistemic consequences:

- 3a: A may falsely believe an internal reason statement about himself, and (we can add)
3b: A may not know some true internal reason statement about himself²⁴

The fourth statement about internalism involves what Williams calls "sound deliberation".

According to Williams, a rational agent is able to discover reasons, through sound deliberation which the agent was not previously aware of having. This follows from 3a and 3b above.

- [4] As a result of such processes [deliberation about one's S] an agent can come to see that he has reason to do something which he did not see he had reason to do at all. In this way, the deliberative process can add new actions for which there are internal reasons, just as it can also add new internal reasons for given actions.²⁵

His point is clear. All reasons for action are provided by the agent's S, either as a present motivation or a motivation the agent will come to know, if the agent performs a sound

²² Williams 1981, "Internal and External Reasons", p. 102

²³ Williams 1981: 103

²⁴ Williams 1981: 103

²⁵ Williams 1981: 104

deliberation. The reasons the agent comes to know by performing a sound deliberation is what Williams calls “rationally accessible” reasons. If the reason-explanation does not satisfy these four criteria there cannot be a reason for acting. The externalist definition of reasons, according to Williams, does not pass these criteria. I will argue that there are no reasons to believe that they should satisfy these criteria. But first I will present Williams’s arguments against the externalist view in detail.

2.3 Williams’s arguments against the externalist position

Williams formulates several arguments against the externalist position. Here I will present the ones I understand as the three most important. In “Internal and external reasons” the arguments are formulated like this:

Argument 1

1. If something can be a reason for action, then it could be someone’s reason for acting on a particular occasion, and it would figure in an explanation of that action.
2. No external reason statement could *by itself* offer an explanation of anyone’s action.

This argument has already shown by *modus tollens* that no external reason statement can by itself explain someone’s action. Williams continues with a reference to one of his favourite examples from Henry James’s story of Owen Wingrave. In this story, Owen is told by his father that he has a reason to join the army, because it is a family tradition, “all his male ancestors were soldiers and family pride requires him to do the same”.²⁶ But Owen has no motivation at all to join the army. Therefore, Williams says, he has no *reason* to join the army neither:

3. Even if it were true (whatever that might turn out to mean) that there were a reason [i.e. an external reason] for Owen to join the army, that fact by itself would never explain anything that Owen did, not even his joining the army.

Having shown that an external reason statement cannot explain an agent’s particular action, Williams goes further pointing to what he sees as the main problem of external reasons statements:

²⁶ Williams 1981, “Internal and External Reasons, p. 106

4. The whole point of external reason statement is that they can be true independently of the agent's motivations.
5. But nothing can explain an agent's (intentional) actions except something that motivates him so to act
6. [Hence externalism is false] so something else is needed besides the truth of the external reason statement to explain action.²⁷

What is needed besides the truth of the external reason-statement is, according to Williams, some psychological link, and this link seems to be a belief. An agent believing an external reason statement about him self may help to explain his action. Now, believing an external reason-statement is to believe that a particular consideration is a reason to act. This is equivalent to an internal reason-statement. Believing that "x is a reason to ϕ " is part of the agent's S, according to Williams. This conclusion is what I called the "Humean trap" above. Williams has a strong argument, saying that even the externalists must explain their reasons for action with some element of the agent's S. This is one of Williams's main challenges to the externalist theory.

Argument 2

1. If an agent has an external reason to ϕ , then "if the agent rationally deliberated...he would come to be motivated to ϕ ".
2. Practical deliberation proceeds from available motivation (from argument 1).
3. Where deliberation proceeds from an external reason "there is no motivation for the agent to deliberate from" (by definition of external reasons).
4. Therefore, all external reason statements are false²⁸

From this argument, Williams continues with a rhetorical question to the externalists:

*What is it that one comes to believe when he comes to believe that there is a reason for him to ϕ , if it is not proposition, or something that entails the proposition, that if he deliberated rationally, he would be motivated to act appropriately?*²⁹

This question is another challenge Williams throws to the externalist view on practical reasons. Williams's question is what there is the agent comes to know, if it is not something that will be explained by a member of this person's S. This question is also related to Williams's "Humean trap", and will be discussed in what follows.

²⁷ Argument 1 is quoted from Williams 1981, "Internal and External Reasons", pp. 106-7

²⁸ The formulation of this argument is quoted from Millgram, E. 1996, "Williams' Argument against External Reasons", p. 198. The premises are quoted from Williams 1981: 109.

²⁹ Williams 1981: 109

Argument 3³⁰

1. [The externalist will have to claim that] the agent should acquire the motivation [to act upon an external reason] *because* he comes to believe the reason statement, and that he should do the latter, moreover, because, in some way, he is considering the matter aright.³¹
2. If the [externalist] theorist is to hold on to these conditions, he will, I think, have to make the condition under which the agent appropriately comes to have the motivation something like this, that he should deliberate correctly; and the external reasons statement itself will have to be taken as roughly equivalent to, or at least entailing, the claim that if the agent rationally deliberated, then whatever motivations he originally had, he would come to be motivated to ϕ .³²

According to Williams, it is not possible to come to believe an external reason-statement by “considering the matter aright”. So the externalist way of thinking, according to Williams, is false. I will present and defend John McDowell’s response to this argument in section 3.7-8.

Williams’s arguments have the following points: Firstly, an external reason cannot by itself explain an action. Secondly, you cannot rationally deliberate and be motivated by an external reason-statement, because the external reason is by definition not among your *S*. Your motivational reasons must contain at least one member of your *S*. Any external reason, whatever they are in Williams’s sense, cannot motivate because they are not a member of the agent’s *S*. Believing a reason-statement is to have an internal reason. According to Williams, the externalists have still not been able to show that it is possible to attain motivation without pointing to an internal reason-statement.

I will argue below, with help from several writers, that there do not need to be any connection between a good external reason and the agent’s *S* at all, for a reason to be a good reason for action. I will argue that the third person’s perspective is not irrelevant for someone having a reason: A person “*A*” may try to inform another person “*B*” by expressing a good external reason by saying “doing this thing will be a good thing to do”. Coming to believe that “this thing will be a good thing to do” may motivate *B*, independently of *B*’s present motivations. This is important to notice. It follows from this claim that there might be a reason for *B* to ϕ , even if *B* is not aware of this reason. This is a central claim of externalism. Externalists agree to some extent with the internalists that if *B* has a desire with a

³⁰ John McDowell made me aware of this argument. See McDowell, J.1995. “Might there be external reasons?” In Altham, J.E.J. and R. Harrison (Eds.) 1995, *World, Mind, and ethics. Essays on the ethical philosophy of Bernard Williams* (Cambridge University Press), Cambridge, pp. 68-85, at 71

³¹ Williams 1981, “Internal and External Reasons”, pp. 108-9

³² Williams 1981: 109

corresponding belief to do something, then *B* does have a motivational reason. But, according to the externalists, is it not necessary that *B* has this desire as either actually present or hypothetically rationally accessible, for there being a good reason for *B* to ϕ . In other words, not all practical reasons are provided by the content of the person's *S*. Here I argue with Parfit and Quinn that *no* reasons are provided by our *S*.³³

3. The DBR-theory contested

3.1 Sketch of the argumentation

Before going to the main discussion of Williams's internalism I will briefly mention what my objections to Williams's arguments are. My first objection is concerned with the second premise in the first argument: Externalists are not compelled to hold that an external reason statement can explain a person's acting all *by itself*. It seems that Williams's point is that an externalist will say that an action can be explained without any reference to the agent's mind. That is not so. The fact that something will be good, or worth to achieve, can be true independently of our current motivations. But the truth of this external good cannot explain an agent's action all by itself.

Counterarguments to Williams's second argument, also involving his theory of rationality, will in the extent of it, have to show that it is not required any form of sound deliberation for being rational (this will be discussed in section 3.7-8). Later in this essay (in section 8) I will argue that rationality consists in responding appropriately to reasons without any need or reference to sound deliberation.

Williams's arguments are meant to show, among other things, that the externalist theory will have to prove Hume wrong in claiming that reason alone never gives rise to motivation. I do not think this is required by the VBR-theory.³⁴ A single belief does not give rise to motivation all by itself, but two beliefs might do. A short answer to the third argument

³³ See Parfit 1997; 2001; 2002; Quinn 1993b; 1993c.

³⁴ My understanding of this subject is indebted to Nagel, T. 1978, *The possibility of altruism* (Princeton university press) 2nd edition, Princeton New Jersey, ch. 5 and Railton, P. 1993, "Non-cognitivism about Rationality: Benefits, Costs, and an Alternative" in *Philosophical Issues*, Vol. 4, Naturalism and Normativity. (1993), pp. 36-51

is that the good external reasons motivates by being acknowledged. It is not presupposed that “reason alone can give rise to motivation”.

Finally, against Williams’s internalism, it will be argued that desires and other elements of S are not what provide us with reasons. We “create” our motivational states by responding to reason-giving facts. This means that our motivational states, such as desires, are not what provide us with reasons. As rational beings we do have good reasons to want to do, what we believe we have good reasons to do. It is a normative question whether “doing this thing” will be good or bad (or right or wrong). This normative question is not answered by our *desire* to do this thing. We do desire to do this thing because we believe that there are good reasons to do this thing. In other words, there are reasons for desires. I will try to argue for all this on the following pages.

3.2 Insensitive agents

Examples of insensitive agents have been seen as a problem for Williams’s internalism.³⁵ I will argue that these arguments do succeed in pointing to some problems with the internalist view. But I do not think that they give us any strong argument against Williams’s non-reductive internalism. Anyway, this way of arguing does point at some central aspects of the discussion.

[A person] A could reach the conclusion that he should ϕ (or a conclusion to ϕ) by a sound deliberative route from the motivations that he has in his actual motivational set³⁶

Sound deliberation is deliberation involving true beliefs. An example of an agent that is insensitive to the content of his actual motivational set shows that Williams’s claim above fails, if the agent performs a sound deliberation, but fails to act upon his desired desires.

The example has the following form:

A has a desire to ϕ , but he is not ϕ -ing because he is insensitive to his desire to ϕ , despite his sound deliberation.

³⁵ Goldstein 2004, “An argument against Williams’ Internalism”, pp. 63-67, Millgram 1996, Williams’ Argument against External Reasons”, pp. 203-216 and Scanlon 2000, *What we owe to each other*, pp. 365-373

³⁶ Williams 2000, “Internal Reasons and the obscurity of blame”, p. 35

Our friend *A* is being rude to his brother “*B*”. *A*’s sister says to him that he should be more polite to his brother. *A* answers that he does desire to be more polite to his brother, but despite having this desire he keeps on being rude to his brother. *A* thinks that since *B* keeps visiting him, *B* cannot be insulted by his rudeness. If *B* were insulted, *A* thinks, then *B* would stop come visiting him.³⁷

In this situation *A* does have a desire to be more polite to his brother, but he is not acting upon this desire, because he is insensitive to it. Does that mean that he does not consider it as a good reason for action? Or is he just neglecting his desire? This situation is not identical with Williams’s story about the mean man, a hard case who “lacks appropriate items in his *S*”.³⁸ When this man is told that he ought to be friendlier to his wife, he answers that he does not care. He has no desire to be friendlier to his wife. Since he has no desire to be friendlier to his wife, he *has* no practical reason to be so neither, according to Williams. Practical reasons must, according to Williams, satisfy his “explanatory requirement”: “If something can be a reason for action, then it could be someone’s reason for acting on a particular occasion, and it would figure in an explanation of that action”.³⁹ The mean man has no reason to be friendlier to his wife; therefore it will be false to claim that he *has* a reason to be friendlier.

In the example above *A* does have a desire to be more polite, but he is insensitive to this desire. There is a difference between being insensitive to a desire one is aware one has, and simply not care about a desire one is told one ought to have. The most central point though, is that *A* may have a sound deliberative route from his motivations to his conclusion, but fails to act upon his most desired desire. It might be that *B* is not insulted by *A*’s rudeness, so *A* has true beliefs. But *B* may be annoyed by *A*’s behaviour, so there is a good reason for *A* to desire to act otherwise. If this is possible, how could it be true that our sound deliberation from our present *S* rationally can provide us with reasons? Do we have to be sensitive? Is sound deliberation like being sensitive to our desires, when we are deliberating on what we are to do in any given situation? Or must we be sensitive to our desires for being able to deliberate soundly? How many facts do we need to know for our deliberation to be sound? If we know

³⁷ This example is influenced by Goldstein 2004: 63-67

³⁸ Williams 2000, “Internal reasons and the obscurity of blame”, p. 39

³⁹ Williams 1981, “Internal and External Reasons”, p. 106. The “explanatory requirement” of reasons, quoted as the first premise in the first argument against externalism above. The term “explanatory requirement” is not mine. It is used by Goldstein 2004: 78; Quinn, W. 1986, “Truth and explanation in Ethics” in *Ethics* 96 no. 3 (spring 1986), pp. 524-544, at 525 (although Quinn uses the term in another setting arguing against Gilbert Harman).

all the relevant facts, but still are not able to act upon an acknowledged good reason, what do we need?

Arguments concerning insensitive agents do not completely succeed, because it is not claimed by Williams's DBR-theory that one must be sensitive to one's desires and always act upon one's most desired desires. Note that Williams says that the agent "*could* reach the conclusion that he should ϕ " in the quote above. I think Williams would agree that *A* in my example has a reason to act more polite to his brother. Williams would also add, it seems, that *A* is not required to act upon this reason, and he may, if he is rational, and performs a sound deliberation, come to believe that he has this reason and act upon it. I.e. *A* may come to believe that he has a stronger or better reason to act otherwise, if he performs a sound deliberation.

On the other hand, the argument concerning insensitive agents succeeds in showing that there is some problems with the DBR-theory on this point. The example is meant to show that the third person's perspective (in my example *A*'s sister) is not irrelevant for the question whether there is a reason for *A* to do something. This claim is of course related to the view that we may distinguish between external good reasons and the reasons Williams claims are the only kind of practical reasons, i.e. an agent present motivational reasons. *A*'s deliberation is defectively because he is aware that he has a desire to be more polite, but he is not acting upon his desire despite his deliberation might be sound. This might indicate that we cannot always come to believe our reasons by sound deliberation. The problem for the internalist view, which this example uncovers, is Williams's refusal of the distinction between explanatory (motivational) and good normative reasons might be a mistake. It is at least possible that Williams's argument for his view on the matter, does not affect the externalist view on good external reasons and motivational reasons. *A* does have a motivational reason to be more polite, according to the VBR-theory. He has "created" his desire to act otherwise in the future, because he believes that being nicer to his brother will be a good thing to do. He has an intention to act more friendly in the future, but unfortunately he fails to act upon his good intention. In this sort of cases the DBR- and VBR-theory are very hard to separate from each other, since they partly agree. The difference is a lot clearer in the case with the mean man. Let us assume that this cruel man beats his wife. According to the VBR-theory, it is reasonable to claim that there is a good reason for the mean man to treat his wife better. We could assume that this man does not understand what we are trying to tell him. He may be mental ill in some way. If so, then our blaming him for not acting upon this reason will be

irrelevant, as Williams claims. But does it follow from the fact that this man has no desire to treat his wife better, that we cannot say that there is a good reason for him to act otherwise? If the mean man is a hard case and lacks motivation to act otherwise, the externalists do agree that it will not make sense to say that he *has* a reason to treat his wife better. When the externalists say that *there is a good reason* for this man to treat his wife better, they are not talking about his current motivations. The good external reason designates the value of not beating one's wife.

Williams argues that there are no other reasons than those that can figure in an explanation of someone's act. And these reasons figure in an explanation as a member of the agent's S. Since the good reason above does not designate a member of the agent's S, it cannot be a practical reason, according to Williams. I think this is a step in the wrong direction; we might have an interest in being able to inform each other when we believe that someone lacks moral or any other adequate information. This makes it reasonable to distinguish between motivational reasons and good external reasons. Before I can argue for this claim, we need to take a closer look on what motivational- and external good reasons may be.

3.3 Motivational reasons and good external reasons

Williams's second argument seems to presuppose his own notion of what it is like to be rational. Being rational, according to Williams, is to have true beliefs and perform sound deliberation. This is what Parfit calls "procedural rationality"⁴⁰. Williams argues in the second argument that there, according to the externalist theory, will be no motivation to deliberate *from*, when one is considering what to do (cf. argument 2 p. 15).⁴¹ This need not be any problem for the VBR-theory, since this theory denies that all practical deliberation proceeds from our present motivational states. According to the externalist theory, our reasons are provided by reason-giving facts that may motivate us independently of our current motivational states. If we are to hold that a present existing motivation must be found in our S, for there to be something to deliberate from, then we will have to be reductive internalist theorists, as Parfit has argued.⁴² Williams is not a reductive internalist, he has some weaker

⁴⁰ Parfit 1997, "Reasons and Motivation", p. 101; Parfit 2001, "Rationality and Reasons"; Parfit 2002, "What we could rationally will".

⁴¹ See Williams 1981, "Internal and External Reasons", p. 109.

⁴² See Parfit 1997; 2001; 2002. Especially Parfit 1997: 108

form of internalism claiming that all practical reasons are provided by either present motivations or some element of S that would become a motivational reason if the agent performs a sound deliberation (i.e. rational accessible reasons). The motivational reasons that are discovered by sound deliberation do not need to be a present motivation which exists before the deliberation is performed. I will argue that there still are some problems with this theory; although I have to admit that the non-reductive internalist theory is more plausible than the reductive theory.

It is confusing that the DBR-theory and the VBR-theory seem to agree that only present motivations can be described as motivational reasons. The disagreements are whether there might be other kinds of reasons for action as well, namely external reasons which are not to be found among the agent's motivational states. If we are to claim that, as the externalists do, then we will have to admit that not all reasons can figure in an explanation of performed actions. But external reasons can still be a reason for someone to act in some way. It is indeed possible that there are good external reasons for action that one does not know about (I am arguing for this claim in section 5.1 and 6.1). This claim does of course follow from the externalist view that there are values that provides us with reasons for action, not motivational states. Holding this view, we can say that there could be a good reason for A to ϕ , even if he is unaware of this reason. It can be a good reason for him to ϕ , because ϕ -ing will be a good thing to do. If A has a present motivation to ψ , then the externalists do agree with the internalists that A has a motivational reason to ψ . But, if we believe that doing ϕ will be a better thing to do, taking A's future well-being in consideration, then we may tell A that there is a good reason for him to ϕ . Since A did not believe that there was a good reason for him to ϕ before we told him that doing ϕ will be a good thing to do, or worth achieving, then there being a reason for A to ϕ will be defined as a value-based external reason.⁴³

⁴³ The view presented here may seem to imply "Particularism of practical reasons", a view which in Dancy's words holds that "a feature that is a reason here need not be a reason there". I.e. there may be a good reason for A to ϕ in this situation, but if things were different there will be no reason for him to ϕ . I agree with Christian Piller when he says that this is true, but "uninterestingly so". The question whether there is a reason for A to ϕ in this situation or not, depends on there being a *good* reason for A to ϕ . If there is a good reason for A to ϕ , then there is a reason for him to ϕ , and he will be substantively rational if he is ϕ -ing. It is not always rational to ϕ , because there in certain situations may be a better reason to do something else. This is trivially true, according to the VBR-theory. For discussions on this subject see Dancy, J. 2004c, *Ethics without principles* (Clarendon press) Oxford; Piller, C. 2006, "Particularism and the structure of reasons" in *Acta Analytica* 21:2, 2006, pp. 87-102; Raz, J. 1999, "The truth of Particularism" in Raz 1999; Hooker, B. & M. Little (eds.) 2000, *Moral Particularism* (Clarendon press), Oxford

3.4 Being a person

The arguments for the externalist view in the last paragraphs imply a particular position of what it is like to be a person. This position holds that as rational beings we do care about our own and other person's well-being. Facts about our own and other person's well-being provide us with value-based reasons for actions. And we are acting rationally when we act upon these value-based reasons.⁴⁴

This way of thinking is present in all contemporary value-based reasons theories. The VBR-theory claims that it is not the case that an agent *A* has a reason to ϕ , because he has an existing motivation to ϕ . There is always a reason *why* *A* is motivated to ϕ . Furthermore, what motivates *A* to desire to ϕ is provided by facts about the *object* of his desire to ϕ , i.e. *A* is motivated because he believes ϕ -ing will be a good thing to do. An example to back up this claim:

Let us assume that our friend *A* is a smoker: *A* has a present desire to have a cigarette but he also believes that there is a reason for him to get rid of this desire. He believes that there is a reason for him to get rid of this desire, because he believes there is a good reason for him to stop smoking. It is possible that *A* has a desire to have a cigarette and at the same time wants to get rid of this desire. It is not unusual to have a desire to do something that one does not want to do. Let us suppose that *A* decides not to have a cigarette. The reason why *A* chooses this action is because he believes that "smoking damages his health" *A* wants to protect his health. It is a reason why *A* wants to be healthy: He enjoys living and he wants to avoid pain, i.e. he does care about his future well-being. *A* knows that smoking is damaging to his health and therefore he decides not to have a cigarette. In this situation *A* is considering whether he shall act upon his desire to have a cigarette or not. The object of his desire to have a cigarette, what he wants to achieve by smoking, is to satisfy his need for nicotine. Now, since *A* knows that smoking is damaging to health, he will not have a cigarette despite his desire to have one. *A* does not value the object of his desire for nicotine. It seems clear then, that there is not *A*'s motivational states that provides *A*'s reasons. It is the value of the action he is considering that gives *A* a good reason to act as he does.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ This is roughly Parfit's position; it will be elaborated in section 5 and 8.

⁴⁵ It is possible that *A*, despite that he knows smoking is damaging to his health, decides to have a cigarette. This is relevant to the question of the possibility of akrasia. It seems that it is possible to act upon a desire one knows there are good reasons to not act upon. But this does not necessarily make the action akratic. It might be that *A* does not care that smoking is damaging to his health or that he is an addict and is thereby not capable to act against his strong desire to have a cigarette.

The internalist might claim that what motivated A to act as he did when he decided to not have a cigarette, was a present motivational state, e.g. a desire to be healthy (or staying alive). But this kind of response seems to “confuse the distinction between desires and cognitive evaluative judgements”.⁴⁶ Judging an action wrong or “unvaluable” according to one’s values, is not the same as acting the way one wants only to fulfil one of one’s present desires. A did not decide not to have a cigarette *because* he had an existing motivation about not having a cigarette. He did it because he believes that there is a good reason for him to stop smoking.

This argument works only against reductive internalism. It is widely accepted that this is an unattractive view. How about Williams’s non-reductive view? Williams’s non-reductive view is a weaker internalist view in the sense that it does not require that the reason one is acting upon must be a present motivational state. Williams’s non-reductive view says that for something to be a reason, it is required that the reason either is present (as a member of S) *or* at least “rationally accessible”. The reason is rationally accessible, if it is possible to come to believe that one has this reason (somewhere among ones S) after having performed a sound deliberation. But what is the difference between a reason being actual in Williams’s sense and a reason being rational accessible? Let’s return to Williams’s “explanation requirement” of practical reasons (cf. p.14 and 19). This requirement says that if a reason is not a member of S, then it cannot figure in the explanation of an action. What an agent “actually does has to be explained by his S”.⁴⁷ Williams’s explanations seem to call for some sort of causal chain explanation from the agent’s S to the action committed. Therefore, if we are to explain an action, we will have to point to the particular member of S which is the *cause* of the action. If so, when it comes to explanations of actions, what is the difference between a present desire which exists before the agent becomes motivated to act and a rational accessible desire that the agent comes to know after having performed a sound deliberation? The desires must be there anyway, if they are to figure in the kind of action-explanation that Williams is talking about. If it is required by a reason that it must figure in an explanation of an action and reasons are provided by S, then the very member of S that explains the action must be actual or present. It cannot merely be a “rational accessible” desire.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Goldstein 2004: 68; Rachel Cohon has some similar remarks in “Are external reasons impossible?” In *Ethics* Vol. 96, No. 3 (Apr., 1986), pp. 545-556; See also Nyholm, S. “Rationality and reasons”.

⁴⁷ Williams 2000, “Internal reasons and the obscurity of blame”, p. 39

⁴⁸ I am in debt to Rüdiger Bittner for this argument. See Bittner, R. 2001. *Doing things for reasons* (Oxford University Press) Oxford, § 236-243, pp.131-5. See also Milligan, D.1980. *Reasoning and the Explanation of Actions* (Harvester Press, Sussex, Humanities Press), New Jersey, Brighton, pp. 141-2.

It is a clear and distinct difference between the two positions here. The DBR-theory can explain A's acting in the example above by a belief-desire explanation. But it may be argued, plausibly, that what motivated A to create this belief-desire pair was the beliefs: (B1) "smoking is dangerous" and (B2) "Stop smoking will therefore be something good or worth to achieve". This is a version of Jonathan Dancy's "pure cognitivism".⁴⁹ I will not commit myself to Dancy's theories, although the VBR-theory which I have presented so far is compatible with Dancy's theories. Anyway, the argument above has shown that it is not necessarily true that our reasons for acting are provided by our present or rational accessible motivational states.

The debate does not end here, however. The internalist might claim that (B2) is provided by a motivational state about what one will do to protect one's health. It can still be insisted that there is a desire that provides the reason on which A acts. The internalist theory is still not falsified.

3.5 Reasons and causes

We have seen that one of the clearest differences between internalism and externalism is the role the reasons play in the explanation of actions. The explanatory role of the internal reasons was questioned above and will now be further contested. It seems to me, that Williams's first argument presupposes that for something to be a reason it must not only be part of the explanation of the action, it must also be the cause of this action. Again Williams is true to the Humean position. Davidson's influential works supports, although in a different manner, Williams's view on this subject.⁵⁰ An argument based on these propositions, as the first argument against externalism is, is no challenge for the VBR-theory, since this position does not hold that reasons are causes in the same sense. An external reason cannot be a cause in a physical notion of the term "cause". It is no physical relation between a good external reason and the mind of the agent. On the other hand, externalism does not reject (at least an externalist need not reject) that some property in an agent's mind in some way or another causes the movements of the agent's limbs. But the value-based reasons might still take part in the explanation of an agent's act. What does this mean?

⁴⁹ Dancy presents his "pure cognitivism" in Dancy, J. 2004b. *Practical reality* (Oxford University Press), Oxford

⁵⁰ See Davidson, D. 2001, *Essays on actions and events* (Clarendon Press), 2nd edition, especially "Action, reasons and causes" (1963). Williams refers briefly to Davidson on this point in Williams, B. 2001, "Postscript, some further notes on Internal and External Reasons" in Millgram, E. (ed.) 2001, *Varieties of practical reasoning* (A Bradford book, The MIT Press), Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, p. 93

When we wonder why a person committed a certain act, say, “walked to the store”, we are wondering what good reason this person had for going to the store. We are not interested in knowing the cause of his bodily movement. It might be that a desire, or another member of S, in one way or another started the movements of the agent’s limbs, and thereby caused the bodily movement that we call “walking”. But the causal chain of mental events in this terms is normatively uninteresting; we want to know *why*, not *how*, the agent acted.

And in describing intentional actions as such, it will be a mistake to look at for the fundamental descriptions of what occurs – such as the movements of muscles or molecules – and then think of intention as something, perhaps very complicated, which qualifies this⁵¹

The internalist desire-belief pair does not explain *why* the agent believed that there was a good reason for him to go the store. The internalist may say that the agent had a desire to go to the store, and the content of this desire explains why he went to the store. But the question *why* the agent believed there was reasons for him to go the store remain unanswered. The reason the agent had for having his desire to go to the store is not explained by describing how the desire caused the agent’s bodily movement. The value-based reason the agent had for going to the store, and the desire he created because he believed there was a good reason for him to go to the store, are not the same thing. We can therefore conclude that good value-based reasons are not causes in the same way as the internalist desire-belief pair is. If this is so, then Williams’s first argument against externalism fails, because the “reason” Williams refers to in premise 1 and 2 are not the kind of reasons the externalist is claiming that exists independently of our S. Williams’s argument do not exhaust the possibility there can be good external reasons which are true independently of our S. The claim that there are such reasons is not proven to be false because these sorts of reasons, if they are not acted upon, cannot figure in a desire-belief explanation of a committed act.

3.6 The truth of external reasons

The next central issue is Williams’s objection to the externalist claim that it might be *true* that there is a reason for A to ϕ , even if A is unaware of this reason, or not motivated to ϕ . Even if

⁵¹ Anscombe, G.E.M. 2000, *Intention* (Harvard University Press) Second Edition, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, § 19

is true that there is such a reason, Williams says, this reason cannot take part of the explanation of an action, and is therefore not a practical reason.

The VBR-theory holds that an agent can be aware of a reason which he is not acting upon. The agent may also act *against* a certain reason or act upon another (more valuable) reason. This indicates that the value-based reasons in debate takes part in explanations of actions performed upon value-based reasons.

What the agent comes to believe, when he is made aware that there being a good reason for him to ϕ , is not an internal reason statement, as Williams claims (Cf. Williams's rhetorical question p. 15). What he comes to believe, is that ϕ -ing will be a good thing to do. The good external reason the agent is made aware of, may be a proposition or something that entails a proposition, but a value-based reason will nevertheless not pass the desire-belief explanation criteria. The externalists can say to Owen Wingrave that there is a reason, or reasons, for him to join the army. The thing is that Owen does not agree that there are any good reasons for him to join the army. This does not entail, as Williams claims, that there are no reasons for Owen to join the army. Owen may believe that there is a reason, or reasons, for him to join the army, but he is not motivated to act upon these reasons. The reason why he is not motivated to join the army is not provided by the fact that he has no *desire* to join the army. It is because he does not *value* a military life. Owen's father insists that there are reasons for Owen to join the army. These reasons may be true independently of Owen's current motivations. This is because Owen's father's reason-statements designate something that he believes are good reasons for joining the army, he is not talking about Owen's current motivational states. It may be true that there would be a good thing for Owen to join the army, but he does not believe that there is anything good about joining the army. It seems likely that Owen does not desire to join the army, because he does not value a military life. Therefore he disagrees with his father's reason-statements. To me it seems implausible to say that there is *no* reason for Owen to join the army, because he has no *desire* to join the army. Williams is right in claiming that the sentence "Owen *has* a reason to join the army" is false. But it does not follow from this fact, that there cannot be any good reasons for Owen to join the army.⁵²

It is possible that Owen becomes motivated to join the army if, for instance, someone tells him a very good reason for him to do so. In such a case Owen, it may seem, will come to

⁵² I am in debt to Scanlon on this point. See Scanlon 2000: 48-9

believe a reason-statement in one way or another. If so, it seems that Williams will claim that this will be an internal reason statement. So, are we caught in the Humean trap? Not necessarily. As I have argued above, if Owen becomes motivated to join the army, is not his motivational reason to do so provided by his previously motivations, but by the value-based reason that he comes to believe. This value-based reason might be true independent of the Owen's S, and could continue to be a good reason for joining the army, even if Owen does not act upon it. In other words, it is not the reason-statement that Owen comes to believe, but the value-based reason. He comes to believe that "doing this thing will be a good thing to do".

3.7 Might there be external reasons?

Yes, there might be external reasons. John McDowell argues for this claim and the title of this section is taken from his paper.⁵³ In his paper McDowell questions Williams's claim that reason-statements are never true on the externalist interpretation.⁵⁴ McDowell argues that Williams's version of the internal reasons theory do not occupy all the space that there might be for someone having a reason. There might be, McDowell concludes, some reasons which are "true already in advance of the agent being motivated".⁵⁵

McDowell elaborates the argument I have quoted as "argument 3" above (cf. p. 16). This argument is meant to give the externalists a real challenge, namely proving that it is possible to come to believe that there is a reason for one to do something, that is not provided by one's S. This is, as we have seen, no problem if reasons are provided by values and not motivational states. McDowell says a good reason for doing a certain act may be true all along, and the agent may become motivated by coming to believe that there is a reason for him to do this thing. Williams denies this way of coming to believe that one have a reason. According to Williams, practical deliberation do proceeds from the agent's S, therefore it is impossible to come to believe a reason-statement which is by definition not among ones S. McDowell is questioning the force of Williams's arguments for this claim. McDowell says: "need the

⁵³ McDowell, J. 1995, "Might there be external reasons?" In J.E.J. Altham and R. Harrison (eds.) 1995, *World, Mind, and ethics. Essays on the ethical philosophy of Bernard Williams*, (Cambridge University Press), Cambridge, pp. 68-85.

⁵⁴ McDowell 1995: 68

⁵⁵ McDowell 1995: 71

external reasons theorists fight on this ground?”⁵⁶ They do not, according to McDowell, because they are not committed to accept the role of “sound deliberation” Williams ascribes to rational agents. Remember that sound deliberation is deliberation among true beliefs and motivational states. McDowell does not deny that some human beings have the ability to perform sound deliberation, but it seems that “sound deliberation” is not required upon all types of reasons. “The crucial question is”, McDowell says, “why must the external reason theorist envisage this transition to considering the matter aright as being effected by *correct deliberation*?”⁵⁷ This is indeed crucial, and in my opinion, it is straight to the point.

The argument in debate is Williams’s claim that what the external reasons theorist needs is “that the agent should acquire the motivation *because* he comes to believe the reason statement, and that he should do the latter, moreover, because, in some way, he is “considering the matter aright”⁵⁸ As we have seen, “considering the matter aright” in Williams’s sense is to have true beliefs and perform a sound deliberation. Remember Williams’s second argument against externalism quoted above (cf. p. 15). His point is that the external reason theorist has no motivation to deliberate *from*. Now, the externalists are not claiming that the agent is “considering the matter aright” when he comes to believe in an external reason statement. The agent comes to believe that there is a good reason for him to do something. It is not required any form of sound deliberation *from* the agent’s existing motivation. All that is required is that the agent comes to believe that there is a reason for him to do something, for this normative external reason to become a motivational reason. Williams’s “sound deliberation” which McDowell refers to as “correct deliberation”, involves deliberation, or reasoning, among beliefs and motivational states. McDowell’s point is that this is not all that can be said about “considering the matter aright”. Williams’s third argument follows from the second which is not very convincing. Moreover, the second argument is based on the first, which I already have argued has lost its impact. The second argument does not exhaust the possibility that we can be presented with external reasons that motivate us independently of previously existing motivations. An agent might come to believe something that he did not previously believe, and it is not any reason to assume that there is required a sound deliberation from one’s S for being able to come to believe this reason. The agent may be motivated to act in virtue of the agent’s rational capacity, or in terms closer to McDowell’s view, in virtue of the agent being “properly brought up”.

⁵⁶ McDowell 1995: 72

⁵⁷ McDowell 1995: 72

⁵⁸ Williams 1981, *Inter and External Reasons*, pp. 108-9 (see argument 3 p.15 in this essay)

McDowell justifies his argumentation with a proposal that someone that is not “properly brought up” cannot be blamed or called irrational for not have performed a piece of rational deliberation from ones S. Moreover, it is not necessary to deliberate at all, for being able to “consider the matter aright” and coming to see that there is a good reason for one to do something.

The transition to “consider the matter aright” need not be capable of being effected by deliberation. We can suppose that a transition would be a transition to consider the matter aright - to recognizing some reason one did not previously realize one had - even if there is no way for one to reason oneself into making it. Since the transition would be to consider the matter aright, the reason would be a reason one had all along. But in kind of case we are envisaging, realization that one had it would not have been reachable by deliberation. So it would be an external reason. I exemplify this possibility by talking about a transition, not plausibly effectable by reasoning, to seeing situations as a properly brought up person would.⁵⁹

The last sentence is crucial. When “seeing situations as a properly brought person would” we have a transition in our beliefs about what we have a reason to do. It is not required that this transition must be reachable by correct deliberation from ones S, i.e. coming to see these reasons need not be “effected by *correct deliberation*”. If there are external reasons based on values, then we may be able to come to believe that we share these values and thereby come to see that there is a good reason for us to ϕ , independently our current motivations.

McDowell’s point is that Williams does not prove that it is impossible to consider the matter aright in this way *because* you cannot come to believe external reasons by performing a sound deliberation from your motivational set.

3. 8 Williams’s reply to McDowell

Williams answers McDowell in “Replies”.⁶⁰ He does not seem to be very affected by McDowell’s argument. He says that there have been some misunderstandings here, accusing McDowell for having misunderstood the following:

Consider these statements:

⁵⁹ McDowell, J.2006, “Response to Philip Pettit and Michael Smith” In Macdonald, C. & G. Macdonald (Eds.) 2006, *McDowell and his critics* (Blackwell Publishing), p. 176. McDowell’s quotation marks. This paper is a response to a criticism of McDowell 1995 by Pettit and Smith.

⁶⁰ Williams, B.1995, “Replies” In Altham, J. E. J. and Ross Harrison (eds.) 2005, *World, Mind, and ethics. Essays on the ethical philosophy of Bernard Williams* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1995 pp. 186-194.

- (R) *A* has a reason to ϕ
 (D) If *A* deliberated correctly, he would be motivated to ϕ ⁶¹

Williams accuses McDowell for saying that it follows from Williams's position that *A* must come to believe the *statement* (D) through deliberation.⁶² This is not what Williams is saying, but this is not McDowell's point either. The upshot of internalism, according to Williams, is that (R) designates an element of *A*'s *S*. If *A* has a reason to ϕ , then he will be motivated to ϕ , if he rational. Now, McDowell's point is that *A* does not have to be previously motivated to ϕ for coming to believe that there is a reason for him to ϕ . What McDowell says, is that it is possible that *A* can "consider the matter aright" and thereby come to see that there is a good reason for him to ϕ . This transition (in his beliefs) can come through independently of a sound deliberation from *A*'s *S*. McDowell suggests that we can

suppose that the kind of conversion I have envisaged might be a case of what external reasons theorist needed: acquisition of a new motivation by way of acquiring correct beliefs?⁶³

Another objection from Williams is that McDowell does not give any account on what an external reason might be, except a claim that there might be a reason for someone to listen to twelve-tone music. Williams says "The fact that listening to twelve-tone music can be a worthwhile activity surely does not give everyone a reason to engage in it".⁶⁴ But McDowell does not have to give us an example of an activity that is worthwhile for everyone. McDowell's aim is to show that one can come to believe that this thing may be a good thing to engage in, independently of a sound deliberation from one's *S*.

In my opinion, McDowell is right in arguing that there might be a reason for someone to listen to twelve-tone music that is not provided by this person current taste of music, as Williams claim that it will be.⁶⁵ McDowell succeeds, as I understand this discussion, to show that Williams's arguments do not prove that external reasons are impossible.⁶⁶ The point that the properly brought up person can come to see that there is a reason for him to ϕ , without a

⁶¹ Williams 1995: 187

⁶² Williams 1995: 188

⁶³ McDowell 1995, "Might there be external reasons?", p. 74

⁶⁴ Williams 1995, "Internal reasons and the obscurity of blame", p. 191

⁶⁵ Williams 1995: 191

⁶⁶ This claim has also been argued by Rachel Cohon in Cohon 1986. Brad Hooker argued that Williams did not succeed in proving that external reasons are impossible in "Williams' argument against external reasons" In *Analysis* Vol. 47 no. 1 pp.42-4 Jan. 1987 (Blackwell). Hooker ascribes his argument to Robert Gay.

sound deliberation from this person's S, is central. This is a strong counterargument to Williams's second and third argument against externalism. Williams's arguments against externalism do not exhaust the possibility that we may be persons who has the capacity to see that there are good reasons for us to do something: Good reasons that are not effected by a correct deliberation from our S.

I will return to my criticism of Williams's internalist theory. But first I will try to explain more carefully what the VBR-theory is all about. We need a better understanding of the VBR-theory's view on reasons, if we are to escape Williams's arguments. Moreover, and perhaps even more important, when the VBR-theory is sufficiently elaborated, it becomes clear that this theory is more plausible and consistent than the internalist theory. Or so I will argue.

4. The VBR-theory

In this part I will present some different definitions and/or explanations of what an external reason is, according to the VBR-theory. I will not suggest any preferable definition, but rather try to explain what role the value-based reasons plays in our agency.

I will continue with a more detailed presentation of Derek Parfit's theory about reasons and motivation and his arguments against internalism.

4.1 Reasons and value

As I see it, the main difficulty with understanding the VBR-theory is to understand what reasons *are* on this view. Sometimes it seems that every belief about something in or about the world is a potential reason to do something, but this is not the whole story of value-based reasons. The main theorists on the VBR-view do to a large extent agree, but they have some different definitions of reasons. According to Joseph Raz reasons are "constituted by valuable aspects of the world".⁶⁷ What does this mean? Raz says:

⁶⁷ Raz 1999, "Agency, Reason, and the good", p. 22

Only reasons understood as facts are normatively significant; only they determine what ought to be done. To decide what we should do we must find what the world is like, and not what our thoughts is like⁶⁸

This is not a very clear definition, but the externalist position on practical reasons is clear enough. When we are considering what to do, we are considering what the world is like, we are thinking about our surroundings or circumstances. Some facts about our circumstances provide us with good external reasons. Now, how are we to relate these facts with what we believe will be worthwhile to achieve? And how do we respond to these facts? T. M. Scanlon says:

A reason is a consideration that counts in favour of some judgement-sensitive attitude, and the content of that attitude must provide some guidance in identifying the kinds of consideration that could count in favour of it.⁶⁹

All definitions of value-based reasons are vague. This is because there are agents observing and believing facts about the world involved in the definition. Observations and beliefs are hard to define, and when they also are to be related to what may be relevantly good, the problem of definition becomes even bigger. So we need to explore what happens when an agent has a reason to ϕ , according to the VBR-theory.

If I am to explain e.g. why I believe there is a reason for me to become a farmer, I can explain my reasons by pointing to the good value-based normative reasons I have for becoming a farmer. I can also explain this by describing the present motivation I have for becoming a farmer. I have a motivational reason to become a farmer as a result of my decision to act upon my good value-based reasons. Both kinds of reasons may be described from a third person's perspective. If you know me (and my reasons) and you are going to tell a friend of yours why I want to be a farmer, you may explain my current motivation to become a farmer, e.g. I inherited a farm and have always valued a quiet country life and therefore I became motivated to start farming. The first reason, that I inherited a farm, may be an *enabler*. This event made it possible, or reasonable, for me to intend to become a farmer. The second reason, that I have always valued a quiet country life, may be a *favourer*.⁷⁰ This latter reason makes it possible to rationalize my decision to become a farmer. You can point to several favouring good reasons that I may have, e.g. I am a good tractor driver, a handyman etc. The reasons may be, and in most cases they are, more complicated. But your friend will

⁶⁸ Raz 1975a, *Practical reasons and norms* (Hutchinson of London), London 1975, p. 18

⁶⁹ Scanlon 2000: 67

⁷⁰ "enabler" and "favourer" are Dancy's terminology. See Dancy 2004b and Dancy 2004c.

understand, at least partly, why I am motivated to become a farmer. I believe there are good reasons for me to become a farmer and I have created my intention for trying to become a farmer. In other words, it is possible to explain why I want to be a farmer by pointing to my present motivation. My present motivation can also be explained by pointing to the good value-based reasons I have created my motivational reason upon.

The internalist might claim that I already had a motivation to become a farmer before I inherited the farm. I was only waiting for the opportunity to act upon my motivation. That may be, but I was not able to act upon this motivation before I inherited the farm, so my motivation to be a farmer have been a dream or a wish. I did not have a dream about becoming a farmer without a reason, I dreamed about becoming a farmer because I believed that it would be nice for me to become a farmer, i.e. I had a value-based reason for becoming a farmer.

The *enabler* is related to what the world is like. The enabling reason is often related to some event that makes an action possible to perform, or a belief or motivation reasonable. The *favourer* is of course also related to how the world is, but it is also about what we reasonably can *want* the world to be like. Together the enabler and the favourer give us a way of rationalizing our reasons. They explain why and how our practical reasons have come through.⁷¹

G. F. Schueler contradicts Raz and Parfit on this subject.⁷² He says that there is only one kind of reasons, he argues for a weak form of internalism with a very broad concept of the term “desire”. His concept of desire is, as I understand it, even broader than the content of Williams’s. Schueler seems to accept Williams’s “explanatory requirement” and argues that there is only our present motivations that can count as practical reasons. The VBR-view presented here, e.g. Raz’ or Parfit’s versions, does not need to accept this criteria. According to Raz and Parfit we do in a way have a pair of belief and desire when we have a motivational reason, but this kind of reason is not all there is to be said about an agent having a reason to act. And furthermore, the reason is, even if it is present as a pair of belief and desire, not *provided* by the desire. This is what the value-based reasons theory is all about; this view

⁷¹ The main theorists on the VBR-view do to a large extent agree on this point, but they operate with different terms. I am using Dancy’s terminology. Raz operates with “explaining” for “enabling” and “guiding” for “favouring” (Raz 1978: 2-4). Parfit operates with “normative” and “motivating” (1997: 99) and “explanatory” and “good” (Parfit 1987: 118). I have adopted the latter term in this essay, when designating good external reasons that do not necessarily take part in an agent’s motivational states.

⁷² Schueler, G.F.1995, *Desire: its role in practical reason and the explanation of action* (A Bradford Book, The MIT Press), Cambridge, Massachusetts, London England, Massachusetts, p. 45-7.

maintains that it is possible that there might be a reason to act in some way independently of our motivational states, since our reasons for acting is not provided by our motivational states. Since the VBR-theorists do not need to accept Williams's claim that there are facts about our motivations that provides our reasons, they are free to hold that there can be both good external reasons and present motivational reasons. This latter kind of reasons is a result of the agent deciding to act upon good value-based reasons.

4.2 Facts and motivation

How can the VBR-theory claim that valuable aspects of the world, facts, can motivate us to act independently of our motivational set? The answer is that when we come to "see" that "doing this thing will be something relevantly good or worth to achieve", we are coming to believe something that we did not previously believe. Coming to believe this value-based reason provides with a good reason to do something. It is hard to explain this in detail, so I will present an overview.

In my opinion McDowell is correct when he says that the agent must come to believe that "doing this thing will be something good", for this reason to become a motivational reason.⁷³ Parfit holds this too, as will be outlined below (in section 5). When one comes to believe that there is a good reason for one to do something, and is motivated to act upon this reason, then this practical reason will be presented as a pair of belief and desire. As far as I can see, this is more or less the same as Williams puts in his set of motivations. So it may seem that we are caught in the Humean trap again. But this does not entail, as Williams claims that the reasons on which we act, the reasons I am trying to define here, thereby are internal reasons provided by facts about the agent's motivational states.

As Raz says, we need to find out what the world is like in order to discover what ought to be done. We do explore facts the world presents us, and our understanding of these facts provides us with good reasons to act. Imagine that you are standing in the middle of the road and seeing a car heading in your direction. This observation, "the understanding of the fact", is the reason why you decide to step out of the road. It is, of course, a reason why you do not want to get hit by the car, but this reason is not provided by the fact that you desire to not get

⁷³ McDowell does not say this explicitly; it is my reading of his position.

hit by the car. Raz says that “Aspects of the world are normative”.⁷⁴ This means, as I understands it, that our understanding of events that we observe might, or perhaps sometimes might not, contain normative reasons to act. In Dancy’s way of thinking courses of action is favoured by the way things are.⁷⁵ Your observation of a car heading in your direction gives you a reason to step out of the road. In Bittner’s words; “The reason is not the acknowledgment, but the acknowledged, and that is the external challenge facing the agent.”⁷⁶ The main thought is that our experience together with our observation of (external) facts is enough to discover good normative reasons for action.⁷⁷ If you decide to step out of the road is not your reason for doing so, provided by you’re having a desire to step out of the road. It is provided by the value of not being hit by a car. As Warren Quinn puts it:

On this view [i.e. the VBR-view, that Quinn calls “objectivism”], a reason to act in a certain way is nothing more than something good in itself that it realizes or serves, or, short of that, something bad in itself that it avoids⁷⁸

To sum up, the good you believe you can achieve by “doing this thing” is what motivates you to “create” your motivations towards this thing. This is how you are responding to the facts you are observing. Rational responses cannot merely be an accidental response provided by your current motivational states. With this in mind I will continue to discuss Williams’s position from Parfit’s point of view. First I will present Parfit’s theory, and then present his argument against internalism.

⁷⁴ Raz 1999, “Explaining Normativity: On Rationality and Justification of Reason”, in Raz 1999, p. 67

⁷⁵ This is very roughly what Dancy argues for in his *Practical Reality* (Dancy 2004b).

⁷⁶ Bittner 2001: 79 (§ 144)

⁷⁷ Of course it may be that both your beliefs and what you believe you see are false. It does not necessarily matter whether your beliefs are true or not for you’re being substantively rational. I will return to this point in section 5.

⁷⁸ Quinn 1993c: 234.

5. Derek Parfit

His position and his argument against Williams's non-reductive internalism

5.1 Parfit's value-based reasons-theory

So far I have presented Williams's arguments for his non-reductive internalism and presented and discussed his arguments against externalism. I have also presented the VBR-theory of practical reasons. I will now present Parfit's externalist theory and his argument against Williams's non-reductive internalism, arguing that Parfit's argument gives us a good reason to reject, or at least doubt, internalism. I will also argue that Williams's arguments against externalism do not affect Parfit's position.

According to Parfit there are indeed external reasons, and only external reasons. We are acting rationally when we are acting upon these reasons.

If so many people believe that *all* reasons are provided by desires, how could it be true that, as I have claimed, *no* reasons are provided by desires? How could all these people be so mistaken?⁷⁹

According to Parfit's value-based reasons-theory practical reasons are "provided by facts about what is relevantly good or worth achieving".⁸⁰ Our reasons are provided by these facts and the rationality of our desires depends on our beliefs.⁸¹ Parfit's theory of reasons can be roughly outlined like this:

1. Normative reasons are not provided by motivational states.
2. A normative reason becomes a motivating reason if and only if the agent believes the normative reason.
3. Whether the agents beliefs are true or not is irrelevant for the action to be rational or not. One may act rational upon a false belief and act irrational upon a true belief.⁸²

These propositions will be defended by these two examples:

⁷⁹ Parfit, D.2001, "Rationality and reasons" in Egonsson, Dag (et. al) (eds.): *Exploring practical philosophy* (Ashgate), p. 18-9. The same sentence is to be found in Parfit 2002, "What we could rationally will", p. 311.

⁸⁰ Parfit 2001: 18

⁸¹ Parfit 2001: 17

⁸² Parfit 1997: 113. As we have seen, is (2) also held by McDowell.

(a) If you tell me that your name is “Jones”, then I have a normative reason to call you “Jones”. This normative reason is not provided by my desire to call you “Jones” (as said in 1 above). I will have a motivating reason to call you Jones, only if I believe that there is a reason for me to call you “Jones” (according to 2 above). Whether I am correct or not in believing that you are telling me the truth, is irrelevant for me having a reason to call you “Jones”. If you were lying, I would still have a motivating reason to call you “Jones”, as long as I am unaware of your lie.

(b) Not many years ago smoking tobacco was seen as a decent habit. Some even thought it was healthy. This is proven to be false. Smoking is damaging to health, dangerous and even deadly. This is a fact, and it was in some way true about this habit before anyone thought about it. Let’s call this fact “C”. If it is true, as is accepted by all scientists on this subject, that smoking tobacco causes dangerous deceases like cancer, then it was true that smoking was causing cancer before it was proven to be true. Therefore, there was a reason to stop smoking before C was proven to be true. Now, if it is true that smoking tobacco causes cancer, then there is a good reason for all smokers to stop smoking (presuming that no one wants to get cancer). Of course those persons who were smoking before C was proven to be true, cannot now be blamed or called “irrational” for not have stopped smoking, because C was true. It is clear then, that there might be good reasons for actions that no one knows about. But this sort of reasons (like C) can not be designated as a *motivating* reason before it is known or believed by someone. Today C is a fact, and this fact informs us about a good reason to stop smoking. Our awareness of this fact provides us with a reason to create a motivational reason to stop smoking (or not start smoking). Let us call the action “stop smoking”, “F”. In relation to (3) above, a person may have believed that it was dangerous to smoke before it was proven to be true. Let us assume that this person came to believe that smoking was dangerous because a parrot told him so. His belief that smoking is dangerous may lack rational justification, but it might be said about this man that he acted substantively rationally when he decided to stop smoking.

If we are substantively rational, then our coming to be aware of C might motivate us to act, independently of our current motivational states. Furthermore, according to the VBR-theory, a person’s coming to believe C and judge the action F right will not necessarily motivate this person to desire to stop smoking. It is a contingent relation between moral judgements (judging an action right or wrong) and being motivated to act. The internalists hold that a person who has judged an action right is motivated to perform this action. Of course, the person might be impeded to do so, but the person does have a desire to F, if F is

judged to be right. But how are the internalists to respond to C? Is it the agent's current motivations that indicate whether he judges the action F right or wrong?

Let us stay with the current example and see what the two opposing positions will say about this sentence:

(R): The fact C provides a good reason for A to F

Let us for simplicity travel 50 years back in time and assume that everyone believes that smoking is a decent habit and that A is a smoker. One day all scientists suddenly agree that smoking causes cancer. This fact C provides A with a good reason to F.

When Williams refers to rational deliberation, as he does in the second and the third argument against externalism, he seems to presuppose his own theory of rationality. Williams says that “an important part of the internalist account lies in the idea of there being a ‘sound deliberative route’ from the agent’s existing S to his ϕ -ing”.⁸³ A sound deliberative route involves, according to Williams, that the agent corrects any “errors of fact and reasoning involved in the agent’s view on the matter”.⁸⁴ How could A in the example above come to believe that there is a reason for him to F from his existing S? Williams’s answer to this question seems to be: “any rational deliberative agent has in his S a general interest in being factually and rationally correctly informed”.⁸⁵ That may be, but how are Williams to explain how A came to be motivated to F, by a sound deliberative route *from* his existing S? I cannot see how Williams can explain A’s transition to come to believe that there will be something good about his doing F, by a sound deliberative route from his S. McDowell was right, what the externalists needed was an example where the agent comes to believe that “doing this thing will be something relevantly good”. The agent cannot come to believe this by a “sound deliberative route” from his S. There is, in McDowell’s words, a transition here, a transition that cannot be “effected by correct deliberation” (cf. section 3.7-8). The VBR-theory can explain this transition and the radical alteration of A’s desires. Before A was made aware of the fact C, he probably in virtue of being a smoker did have a desire to have a cigarette. At

⁸³ Williams 2000, “Internal reason and the obscurity of blame, p. 36

⁸⁴ Williams 2000: 36

⁸⁵ Williams 2000: 37

this point *A* did want to have this desire. After being informed about the fact *C*, *A* does not believe that there is any good reason for him to have this desire to have a cigarette anymore. This alteration of *A*'s desires can the VBR-theory explain, because this theory holds that *A*'s reason to *F* is not provided by his *S*. It seems more plausible that *A*'s reason to *F* is provided by the value of his doing *F*. It is something good that he believes he can achieve by his *F*-ing, namely reduce the risk of getting cancer.

If we follow Parfit's VBR-theory, we can hold that *R* might produce in *A* some wholly new desire to *F*, if *A* is substantively rational. Until recently *A* did not believe that smoking causes cancer. *A* is now made aware of the fact *C*. *A*'s coming to believe *C* has woke a new motivation in *A* to *F*. It seems strange to say that this motivation to *F* is provided by *A*'s *S*. *A* did not have any desire to stop smoking before he was made aware of *C*. The externalists may say that *R* entails "If *A* deliberated on the *facts*, and were fully rational, he would be motivated to *F*". On Parfit's view an agent is "fully rational" if the agent is "substantively rational". To be substantively rational is to care about one's own and other person's well-being. If *A* is substantively rational and is made aware of *C*, then he (contingently) will be motivated to *F*. This externalist claim is not challenged by Williams's second argument, because practical rational deliberation does not only proceed from available motivations.⁸⁶

I have now presented Parfit's position and argued that his position is not contested by Williams's arguments against externalism (I will return to this point in section 5.3). If reasons are based on values and not desires, then we can answer "yes" to the first question (cf. the map section 1.2). I have discussed Williams's arguments against the externalist position. I argued that it seems Williams, in the first argument, is using the term "reason" in another sense than the kind of reasons the externalists claims that can be true independently of our *S*. I have presented McDowell's reply to Williams and argued that McDowell's is right in claiming that the "externalists do not need to fight on this ground"⁸⁷. I will now present Parfit's arguments against Williams's internalism.

5.2 Parfit's argument against Williams

The argument follows from the position presented above. (1) There are reasons for actions which are not currently motivational reasons: These reasons will be defined as external value-

⁸⁶ My argument is based on Parfit's argumentation, especially Parfit 1997: 116.

⁸⁷ Cf. section 3.7-8 in this essay. McDowell 1995: 72.

based reasons. (2) Since reasons are based on values, we have reason for having our desires. Williams reject the first claim and, according to Parfit, cannot the internalist theory explain why one has reasons to do what one desires to do. I will now present his arguments and argue that they do give us a convincing argument against Williams's internalism. I will also argue that Parfit's externalist theory is not contested by Williams's arguments against externalism.

There are, as was said in the presentation of Williams's internalism, two sorts of Desire-based theories.⁸⁸ Parfit distinguishes these two internalist theories like this: First, the theories of "instrumental rationality" that claims that we have a reason to do something just in case

(A) Doing this thing might help to fulfil one of our present desires⁸⁹

This view, according to Parfit, is reductive. This version of internalism claims that we have a practical reason to do something, only if we have a present desire to do this thing. The second DBR-theory is less strict than the first one. This theory claims "deliberative rationality" and holds that we have a reason just in case:

(B) If we knew the relevant facts, and went through some process of deliberation we should be motivated to this thing.⁹⁰

This view is non-reductive, according to Parfit. Its "non-reductiveness" is shown by the second part of this disjunction: "we cannot have some reason for action unless our act might fulfil one of our desires, or is something that, after informed deliberation, we would be motivated to do".⁹¹ Parfit does not mention any names in his presentation of the two DBR-theories. It is rather clear though, that the reductive model of rationality fits with Williams's "sub-Humean model"⁹² and the non-reductive model fits with Williams's favoured non-reductive theory.⁹³ Parfit wants to reject all reductive theories. This rejection is not relevant for the present purpose, since Williams is no reductivist. The present purpose is rather to reject the non-reductive DBR-theory. That is, in this context, Williams's internalism.

⁸⁸ There might be even more internalist theories. John Robertson describes several theories in Robertson, J. 2001, "Internalism, Practical Reason, and Motivation" In Millgram (ed.) 2001, pp. 127-150; Prichard argues against a reductive theory in "Acting, willing and desiring" (1945) in Prichard, H. 1968, *Moral obligation and Duty and interest, Essays and lectures* (Oxford University Press), Oxford, pp. 187-198; Smith presents several different versions of internalism in Smith 1996. For simplicity I do operate with only two versions in this paper, the reductive and the non-reductive.

⁸⁹ Parfit 2001:, "Rationality and reasons", p. 18

⁹⁰ Parfit 2001: 18. On Williams' view, the deliberation mentioned here will be "sound deliberation".

⁹¹ Parfit 2001: 18

⁹² See Williams 1981, "Internal and External Reasons", pp. 101-2. Presented on page 12 in this essay.

⁹³ See Williams 1981; 1995; 2000; 2001.

As we have seen, Williams's internalism claims that an agent has a reason to ϕ , if ϕ -ing will fulfil some of the agent's actual desires or he would be motivated to ϕ after having performed a sound deliberation. And as a result of this sound deliberation the agent comes to know some reasons that he was not aware of that he had, i.e. they are "rationally accessible reasons". In other words, our practical reasons are provided by some elements of our motivational set, "S". I have argued that we can doubt this claim. In the example above was A not aware of the fact C. How can A come to know that the fact C provides him with a good reason to F by a sound deliberation from his existing S? He cannot do that, by all means, I am not saying that it is impossible, according to Williams's theory, for A to be informed about C. But when A is informed about the fact C, and comes to understand that this fact gives him a good reason to F, how could A come to believe that F-ing will be a good thing to do without caring about his own well-being? It is A's concern about his own future well-being that motivates him to F. It is facts about his own life that provides him with good reasons to act. This reason is not provided by the fact that he *is* motivated to do this thing. Williams claims that the reason is provided by A's S in one way or another. But, as we shall see (in section 8), Williams cannot accept that A must care about his own well-being for being rational. What is it that motivates A to F, if it is not concern about his own well-being? Does A come to see that there is a reason for him to F because he performs a "sound deliberation" or because he has "a general interest in being factually and rationally correctly informed"?⁹⁴ This makes no sense. Why can't facts about A's life give him good reasons to act? Why can't A's motivational reasons be based on these good reasons, as the VBR-theory claims? Is it because these facts do not designate a member of the agent's S? Furthermore, it is not claimed by the externalists that these facts can explain someone's acts all by themselves, but they can explain *why* someone is motivated to act. We do have reasons to act upon our desires. Our desires may also affect which reasons we do discover that we have. Such cases do not make our reasons *provided* by these desires. The thing is that on the VBR-theory our reasons are not provided by *having* these desires, but by the facts which give us reasons to *have* these desires.

If some aim is worth achieving, we have a reason both to have this aim and to try to achieve it. Since our reason for acting is the same as our reason for having the desire on which we act, this desire is not itself part of this reason. And we would have this reason even if we didn't have this desire.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ These quotes are taken from Williams 2000, "Internal reason and the obscurity of blame", pp. 36-7.

⁹⁵ Parfit 2001, "Rationality and reasons", p. 19

There might be a good reason to desire to do what is worth achieving, even if we do not have this desire. It must be added here, that the VBR-theory will not deny that there might be some reasons we would not discover that we have, if we did not have certain desires. My having a desire to go to America, for instance, may give me a favouring reason to go to America, if I am offered a trip to America. The desire may in some way affect my decision to go to America, but it does not provide it, the fact that I have a desire to go to America does not explain why I believe there is a good reason for me to go to America (such cases will be discussed more carefully in section 7).

The reasons we have for having our desires are according to Parfit “provided by various natural features of the objects of our desires, and it is from these reasons that that all other reasons derive their force”.⁹⁶ The objects of our desires are the facts that provide us with good value-giving reasons to create our desires. In other words, the value of the fact provides us with a reason to desire to achieve what may be relevantly good about this act.⁹⁷

The main disagreement between the DBR- and VBR-theory is not merely what our motivational reasons for action consists of. Both theories agree that we have certain motivations before performing an act. The disagreement is concerned with our reasons for having the desires on which we act. The reasons we have for having our desires the DBR-theory cannot recognize or explain, while the VBR-theory certainly can, Parfit argues.⁹⁸

We have two kinds of desires, Parfit says: (1) “intrinsic desires”, our desires are intrinsic when we want things for their own sake. (2) “Instrumental desires”, desires that we have only as means to something else. For example, you may have an intrinsic desire to have something to drink, all you want is something to drink and it does not matter what kind of liquid it is. You may also have an instrumental desire to drink wine, because you want to taste the lovely blend of wine and cheese. In both cases there are reasons for why these desires are created. All desires have *objects*, which are what we believe we can achieve by doing these things. The “objects” of our desires are, according to Parfit, “some event, process or state of affairs”.⁹⁹ The reasons, which are given by the objects of our desires, are “object-given” reasons, according to Parfit. The reasons that are given by our *having* certain desires are

⁹⁶ Parfit 2001, “Rationality and reasons”, p. 20

⁹⁷ According to Parfit, it is not necessary to formulate a theory of what is good or bad (Parfit 2001: 20). I will return to this point in section 6.3.

⁹⁸ Parfit 2001: 19

⁹⁹ Parfit 2001: 21

“state-given” reasons. There are intrinsic and instrumental reasons among both object- and state-given reasons. That makes it four kinds of reasons. On Parfit’s version of the VBR-theory these reasons are elaborated like this:

1. Intrinsic object-given reasons: “What we want would be in itself relevantly good, or worth achieving”
2. Instrumental object-given reasons: “This thing would have good effects”
3. Intrinsic state-given reasons: “Our wanting this thing would be in itself good”
4. Instrumental state-given reasons: “Our wanting this thing would have good effects”¹⁰⁰

On the DBR-theory these reasons, according to Parfit, are elaborated like this:

1. Intrinsic object-given reasons: “We want this thing”
2. Instrumental object-given reasons: “This thing would have effects that we want”
3. Intrinsic state-given reasons: “We want to want this thing”
4. Instrumental state-given reasons: “Our wanting this thing would have effects that we want”¹⁰¹

Finally, we are at the crucial point in Parfit’s argument: How can Williams’s DBR-theory explain or recognize the reason for intrinsic object-given reasons? We may ask “why do you want to do this thing”? It seems implausible that you can desire to do this thing, without having a reason to desire to do this thing. It must be something that you believe you can achieve by doing this thing, e.g. something relevantly good, as the VBR-theory claims. If there is nothing you want to achieve by doing this thing, there seems to be no other explanations available than the fact that “doing this thing will serve or further your desire to do this thing”. This is the reductive view and it is not very attractive. Imagine a person who has a strange desire to, say; turn on any radio he sees to be turned off.¹⁰² If there is nothing that this person wants to achieve by doing this thing, how can the DBR-theory say that there are no reasons for this person to do this thing? On the reductive view, it can be said that this person has a reason to turn on any radio he sees to be turned off, because he has a present desire to do this thing. Turning on this radio will serve or further his desire to turn on any radio he sees to be turned off. This view is implausible; according to this view, we will have a reason to do anything we happen to desire. There will be no requirements for what one has a good reason to do. If a person has a desire to kill all persons wearing blue shirts, then he will have a reason to do so, according to this view. So, how could there be that our rationality and morality can be provided by our responses based on the desires which we happen to have? Williams rejects this view, remember his gin & tonic example (cf. section 2.1). It does not

¹⁰⁰ Parfit 2001, “Rationality and reasons, p. 22

¹⁰¹ Parfit 2001: 23

¹⁰² This is Warren Quinn’s example. See Quinn 1993c, “Putting rationality in its place”, p. 236

make sense to say that the person who falsely believes that a certain glass is containing gin has a reason to drink the content of that glass when the glass in fact contains petroleum. But is the externalist objection I am presenting here avoided by claiming that the agent would come to know that he has no reason to drink the petroleum, if he were correctly informed and performed a sound deliberation? The question is: Why does he care about the glass containing petroleum? Obviously it is because drinking petroleum will be painful. Is not this to care about one's own future well-being? And does not this fact make the reason on which the agent acted value-based?

Moreover, it seems reasonable to claim that Williams must admit that we have intrinsic object-given reasons and these sorts of reasons are now shown to be impossible to explain on the non-reductive view. Where did they go? Williams is forced to either accept the reductive internalist view he rejects, or accept a value-based view, that he also rejects.

5.3 Williams's arguments against externalism again

I will now return to Williams's arguments against externalism of practical reasons and argue that they are no threat to Parfit's externalist theory.

I will repeat my summary of Williams's arguments: Firstly, an external reason cannot by itself explain an action. Secondly, you cannot rationally deliberate and be motivated by an external reason, because the external reason is by definition not among your S. Your motivational reasons must contain at least one member of your S. Any external reason, whatever they are in Williams's sense, cannot motivate because they are not a member of the agent's S. Believing a reason-statement is to have an internal reason. According to Williams, the externalists have still not been able to show that it is possible to have a motivational reason without pointing to an internal reason-statement.

I have already shown that the VBR-theory presented in this essay does not claim that an external reason can explain an action all by itself. We have also seen that the argument involving Williams's theory of rationality (procedural rationality) does not affect Parfit's view, since his theory involves another notion of rationality (substantively rationality). And, one does certainly not come to believe in an external reason-statement by considering the matter aright, as being "effected by correct deliberation", as McDowell argued.¹⁰³ None of

¹⁰³ McDowell 1995

Williams's arguments affect Parfit's theory. Parfit does not claim that an external reason can explain an action all by itself. Since our reasons are provided by values and not desires, the first argument has no force. At last, believing that "doing this thing will be in itself relevantly good" on the VBR-theory, is not, as Williams claims, the same as having an internal reason. Williams seems to argue against a mysterious externalist view that claims that "external reasons can explain actions all by themselves" (cf. the second premise in the first argument against externalism p. 14). This claim is not equivalent with the view that there might be true that there is a good reason for *A* to ϕ , independently of *A*'s current motivations. "Doing this thing will be a good thing to do" seems to be equivalent with "There is a good reason for *A* to ϕ ". The claims designate the reasons we have for "creating" our desires. There is nothing mysterious about these claims. Therefore, I can not see any good reason to reduce claims about practical reasons to facts about our motivational states.

6. The DBR-theory contested some more

In this part I will present and discuss Williams's answers to his critics. I will also present "the hybrid view" on practical reasons, a view that holds that there can be both desire based and value based reasons for action.

6.1 Williams's replies

Williams intends to clear up some misunderstandings about his theory in his "Internal reasons and the obscurity of blame".¹⁰⁴ I will in this section present and discuss Williams's arguments for internalism and against externalism in this paper.

Williams summarises his internalist claim from "Internal and external reasons" and says that "A has a reason to ϕ only if he could reach the conclusion to ϕ by a sound deliberative route from the motivations that he already has".¹⁰⁵ This is a central claim in Williams's internalist-

¹⁰⁴ In Williams, B. 2000, *Making sense of humanity and other philosophical papers* 1982-1993, 2nd edition, (Cambridge University Press) Cambridge, pp. 35-45

¹⁰⁵ Williams 2000: 35

theory. He stresses that the sentence “A has a reason to ϕ ” has “normative force”.¹⁰⁶ That is, if A believes that he has a reason to ϕ , then this belief has a motivational content, and is therefore to be defined as an internal reason-statement. It is, as we have seen, according to Williams, only this sort of reasons that can be practical reasons for actions.

The sound deliberative route agents performs for coming to believe their practical reasons involves, according to Williams, “at least correcting any error of fact and reasoning involved in the agents view of the matter”.¹⁰⁷ This means that an agent must have true beliefs for being able to perform a sound deliberation. Let us consider the example of the agent that has a desire to drink the content of a certain glass he believes is containing gin. The glass contains petroleum and therefore he has no reason to drink the content of the glass. “This is because there is not a sound deliberative route from his motivational set to this glass of petroleum”.¹⁰⁸ Of course, there is no sound deliberative route from the agent’s motivational set, “S”, to this glass. How could there be? Of course he has no reason to mix the petroleum with tonic, and drink it. The agent must come to believe that there is a reason for him to get rid of his desire to drink the petroleum. What is wrong with the externalist claim that the agent might come to believe that the glass contains petroleum and that this transition of the agent’s beliefs provides him with a reason to get rid of his desire to drink the petroleum? Why and how are this transition to come through by a sound deliberation *from* this person’s S? Moreover, does it follow from the fact that this agent *has* no reason to mix the content of the glass with tonic and drink it, that there is no reason for this agent to believe that having a glass of gin & tonic would be nice? It does not; this example does not give us any reason to believe that all good reasons are provided by desires.

Williams gives us another argument for the internalist position. There is a mistake, Williams says, to separate explanatory and normative reasons:

If it is true that A has a reason to ϕ , then it must be possible that he should ϕ for that reason; and if he does not act for that reason, then that reason will be the explanation of his acting. So the claim that he has a reason to ϕ – that is, the normative statement “He has a reason to ϕ ” – introduces the possibility of that reason being an explanation; namely, if the agent accepts that claim (more precisely, if he accepts that he has more reason to ϕ than to do anything else). This is a basic connection. When the reason is an

¹⁰⁶ Williams 2000, “Internal reasons and the obscurity of blame”, p. 36

¹⁰⁷ Williams 2000: 36

¹⁰⁸ Williams 2000: 36

explanation of his action, then of course it will be, in some form, in his S, because certainly – and nobody denies this – what he actually does has to be explained by his S.¹⁰⁹

An explanation of what an agent actually does is indeed explained by the motivational reason the agent acts upon. Nobody denies this, but this claim does not give us any argument for not to separate between explanatory (motivational) and good external (normative) reasons. This is because we have no reason to accept Williams's claim that reasons are provided by our S, as the argument above presupposes. According to the externalist view I am defending here, there might be good external reasons for A to ψ or not- ϕ as well as his present motivational reason to ϕ , this might be true even if A is not aware of these reasons. The internalists do not agree that there might be good external reasons for A to ψ or not- ϕ in this particular situation. Since internalism denies this last claim, it has no problem with explaining the reasons on which the agent acted, according to Williams.

But suppose we take the externalist view, and so accept that it can be true that A has a reason to ϕ without there being any shadow or trace of that presently in his S. What is it the agent comes to believe when he comes to believe he has a reason to ϕ ? If he becomes persuaded of this supposedly external truth, so that the reason does then enter his S, what is it that he comes to believe? This question presents a challenge to the externalist theorists.¹¹⁰

This is a challenge, but not a challenge that the externalists cannot answer. Suppose that A is about to go to bed and does not know that there is a poisonous snake under his pillow. This fact provides a reason for A not to go to bed. Williams's question is how the externalists are to explain that A has this reason, he has not, because he does not know about the snake. The externalists will say that *there is a good reason* for A not to go to bed, but he has not any *motivational* reason not to go to bed, yet.¹¹¹ Assume that B saw the snake hiding under the pillow and then tells A that he should not go to bed, because there is a snake under his pillow. A is now aware of the fact "P" (that there is a poisonous snake under the pillow) and this fact provides a good reason for A to "N" (not go to bed). There is a reason why A now believes that there is a reason for him to N. He comes to believe a fact about the world which he until recently did not believe, and this fact provides A with a good reason, which A responds to. And we can add: in this case there was a reason for A to N, although it was not a motivational reason, before he became aware of P. This gives us a reason to separate between good

¹⁰⁹ Williams 2000, "Internal reasons and the obscurity of blame", p. 39

¹¹⁰ Williams 2000: 39

¹¹¹ Notice that the view I am defending here do not hold the claim Williams ascribes to the externalists in the quote above. The VBR-theory I am presenting do not claim that it "can be true that A has a reason to ϕ without there being any shadow or trace of that presently in his S" (Williams 2000: 39). The VBR-theory claims that there might be true that there is a good reason for A to ϕ independently of his S.

(external) reasons and explanatory (motivational) reasons presented as motivational states. On the VBR-theory A's motivational reason to N is a response to the good external reason that there is for him to N. Williams does not accept that there can be any good reason for A independently of A's S. Why?

P is a "supposedly external truth" (cf. the quote above). There being a fact P which provides a good reason for A to N might be true independently of A being aware of P. Why must all good reasons for acting be provided by facts about our present S? When A becomes aware of the fact P, and responds to the good reason there is for him to avoid poisonous snakes, he is, if he is substantively rational, motivated to N. If A is N-ing, then his N-ing will, of course, be explained by his S (his present motivation to N will explain why he is N-ing). This does not give us any reason to believe that A's reason to N is provided by the fact that he is motivated to N. N-ing will be a good thing to do, and the good about this act, is in no way provided by, or based on, A's existing motivation to N. It is not A's motivations that explains what may be right or wrong to do in situations like this. I cannot see any good reason for reducing moral judgements to facts about our current motivations.

6.2 The mean man again

The challenge may not be completely answered, but let us continue: Williams backs his internalist claim with the story about the mean man. For stressing my point, I am assuming that the mean man is beating his wife. How are we to say to this man that there is a reason for him to stop beating his wife? Let us use Williams point in the example above; assume that A is a hard case just like Williams's mean man. B says to A that there is a reason for him to N. A answers "why"? B says it is because there is a poisonous snake under A's pillow. A answers that he does not care about that. What A's reason could be for not caring about there being a poisonous snake under his pillow is hard to say, but this is analogous to Williams's example. Most of us find it hard to believe that A acts as he does in this situation. But how are we to say that there is a reason for A to N? We must admit that he *has* no practical reason to N. But what we admit is that A has no *present motivational* reason to N. The value-based externalist view can without any strange metaphysical theory say to A that there is a good reason for him to N. What is the alternative? Should we say to A that "There is a reason for you to N, if you already have a motivation to N"? That would sound strange. Nobody will claim that. We can perfectly well tell A that there is a fact P that provides A with a good reason to N. We do not

need to assume that he agrees with this claim (although we might do). This gives us another reason to separate between motivational reasons and good external reasons, and therefore, it seems plausible then to distinguish between two kinds of reasons. We have motivational reasons, reasons that are presented as motivational states. These reasons are the only kind of reasons that Williams will accept as practical reasons. But, as I have argued, it is possible that there are external good reasons no one knows about. Furthermore, there are a lot of reasons competent adult deliberators can suggest, or insist, that it would be a good thing for other agents to be aware of. These latter reasons cannot be designated as a mental state being a mental property in an agent's mind. These reasons are not irrelevant for us being rational persons caring about our own and other person's well-being. It may be that our rational capacity involves, among other things that we are interested in what other competent deliberators have to tell us. It is not controversial to claim that different persons know different things. It can be thought that a competent deliberator can tell another person about a good reason for action which is true already in advance of this latter person being motivated.¹¹² If reasons are based on values is there nothing mysterious with coming with claims like this. If reasons are provided by desires, then it will not make sense to come with such claims. Why does not this fact give us a reason to claim that reasons are based on values and not desires? Obviously because it does not follow from my claim that there is a reason for *A* to *N* that it is *true* that reasons are based on values. But if they are, then I will have a reason to come with such claims. Moreover, I cannot see that Williams has succeeded to prove that this is not so.

There is one specific thing the external reasons theorist wants me to say, that the man [i.e. the mean man] has a reason to be nicer. Or, rather, the external reasons theorists *may* want me to say this: one of the mysterious things about the denial of internalism lies precisely in the fact that it leaves it quite obscure when this form of words is thought to be appropriate. But if it is thought to be appropriate, what is supposed to make it appropriate, as opposed (or in addition to) all those things that might be said?¹¹³

Why must the externalists give an account of when and where there will be appropriate to say that there is a reason for someone to ϕ ? Of course, it would be a lot easier if we hold that someone has a reason to ϕ , when this person actually has a motivational reason to ϕ . But this, as I hope I have shown now, is not always the case. We cannot deny that someone might tell someone else that there is a reason for them to do something, when they certainly do not have a present motivational reason to do this thing. The only requirement we need to ascribe to a

¹¹² As McDowell argued in McDowell 1995, "Might there be external reasons?"

¹¹³ Williams 2000, "Internal reasons and the obscurity of blame", p. 39

practical reason, is that it must be reasonable to believe that there is a reason for doing this thing. If one falls out of an aeroplane, one have a reason to try learning to fly perhaps, but this reason will be very hard to believe in. On the other hand, there is nothing wrong by telling someone there being a reason for them not to jump out of aeroplanes without a parachute, even if they are not previously aware of this reason. Again it may seem that Williams avoids the objection. He is not forced to hold that agent's according to his theory, would not come to understand this situation. The agent may have this capacity in his mind. But, again, is not this to confuse having a reason as a motivational state and the agent's cognitive evaluative judgement? The latter may not be present as a motivational state before the agent becomes aware of this reason.

6.3 The obscurity of blame

The externalists have nothing interesting to say about blame, according to Williams. I will argue that there is no obscurity of blame on the externalist view. I will argue that there seems to be the internalist view that has a problem of blaming agents for performing blameworthy action.

When the failure is explained, it seems that for blame to be appropriate there must be some generally reprehensible characteristic involved in the explanation the agent must have been careless, or lazy, or self serving or something of the sort¹¹⁴

I do not agree. That an agent actually was motivated is a reason to blame him, if the action is blameworthy. As I have argued above (section 5.2 p. 44), it seems more likely there being the internalists which have a problem of ascribing blameworthy actions. Let us discuss the mean man again. Williams does admit that there are several objections available for us in this situation, but he also explicitly claims that this man *has* no reason to act friendlier to his wife. I have already admitted that this man *has* no motivational reason to be friendlier to his wife. But, I have also claimed that since the VBR-theory can separate between motivational- and good external reasons, we do have a reason to say to this man, that there is a reason for him to act otherwise. It is possible that this man does not have a reason to be friendlier because he *will* not. If so, and reasons are based on values, then we do have a reason to say to this man that it would be better if he acted otherwise.

¹¹⁴ Williams 2000, "Internal reasons and the obscurity of blame", p. 40

There might be a problem with this argument, although it is very political correct and plausible. The problem is, if the mean man really is a hard case, then it can be objected that we need to refer to some moral theory to justify the claim that there is a good reason for the mean man to act otherwise, i.e. we need to explain what makes it good if he acts otherwise. But such a moral theory will have no effect on the hard case, so there will be no use in coming with such a claim to the mean man. Williams seems to argue in these lines when he claims that externalists have nothing to say about an agent's actions being blameworthy. Since the good reason we claim this man should be aware of, are external to him, we cannot blame him for not having it. So we need to refer to some moral theory for being able to blame this man, but this, as said, will be of no use in such a hard case. This essay is not about moral theories, it is about practical reasons. There is no problem in this case for the externalists, however. If we for instance adopt Scanlon's "buck-passing view",¹¹⁵ a view Parfit accepts, and claims that:

(...) goodness is not itself a reason-giving property, but is the property of having such properties. Something's being good is the same as its having certain natural properties that would, in certain contexts, give us reasons to want this thing.¹¹⁶

It will be a good thing for the mean man to see that there is a reason for him to act otherwise. No one is perfect and therefore we do have reasons to tell each other what might be relevantly good to do in different situations, independently of person's present motivational states. Is it "bluff" to hold this view? Are claims like this really "optimistic internal reason claims", as Williams argues they are?¹¹⁷ Do we have to restrict us to a moral theory for being able to explain what may be relevantly good about an act? I am not so sure. Claiming that there is a good reason for the mean man to act otherwise is not "bluff", because this claim does not designate an absent element in the mean man's S. The claim that there is a good reason for the mean man to act otherwise refers to the value of not beating one's wife. The fact that there is a good thing to not beat one's wife is a reason to want to do this thing. This is not an optimistic internalist claim; it is a value-based reason.

I have been arguing that it seems possible that there can be good reasons to do something, even if we are not motivated to do this thing. This is possible because we can distinguish between external good reasons and motivational reasons. To hold this view, entails that there

¹¹⁵ Scanlon 2000, *What we owe to each other*, p. 95-100

¹¹⁶ Parfit 2001, "Rationality and reasons", p. 20

¹¹⁷ Williams 1981, "Internal and External Reasons", p. 111

are lots of reasons “out there” which one is not acting upon. Since these reasons, I have admitted, are not present motivational reasons, they must be something else. Now, what are they? Or perhaps better formulated, *where* are they? It seems to be two possibilities: (1) they are somewhere among the agent’s beliefs, but for the moment the agent is unaware of this reason. (2) The reasons are unknown, just like C was in the example I gave above (cf. section 5.1). These sorts of reasons are good external reasons which potentially could be made into motivational reasons. This may seem to be bad news for the externalist position, because this is more or less the same as Williams says. However, there is still a major difference here. The difference is, whether there are the agent’s desires or his values that provides him with reasons for action.

Parfit claims that *no* reasons are provided by desires. I will now argue that we should reject even the weakest of all DBR-theories, if we can call it a DBR-theory at all, namely the “hybrid view”.

7. The hybrid view

Ruth Chang presents and defends a view on practical reasons she calls the “hybrid view of practical reasons”.¹¹⁸ This view holds that there are some exceptions from the VBR-view that *no* desires provide us with reasons for action. The exceptions which can provide us with reasons for actions that are not based on value are what Chang calls “affective desires”. Chang argues that both Raz and Scanlon do hold that there are particular peculiar exceptions from the VBR-theory, where desires provide us with reasons for actions. Chang argues that Parfit should have some exceptions too, but I am sceptical to these exceptions. I will try to argue that these “exceptions” are not really exceptions, because not even affective desires, if there is any as Chang defines them, can stand as reasons for actions. I will argue that we do have desires that we have reasons to fulfil, but this fact does not make our reasons *provided* by having these desires.

¹¹⁸ Chang, R. 2004, “Can desires provide reasons for action?” In R.J. Wallace, et. al (eds.) 2000, *Reason and value – themes from the moral philosophy of Joseph Raz* (Clarendon press), Oxford, pp. 56-90.

7.1 Affective desires

The affective desires are characterized as “feeling-like-it-desires”. These affective desires, Chang argues, are the Achilles heel of the VBR-theory of reasons. If it is true that these affective desires are the Achilles heel of the VBR-theory Chang claims, then they become some sort of a Trojan horse.¹¹⁹ Her purpose is not to argue for a desire based reasons view, but for a hybrid view that opens for both desire-based and value-based reasons in a theory of practical reasons.¹²⁰

Chang sometimes gets an affective desire to take a cartwheel. This sort of desires, she says, “is not compulsions beyond the agents control and they are familiar states we often are in”.¹²¹ Chang argues that the leading theorists on the VBR-theory in fact do hold that there are certain exceptions from their claim that no reasons are provided by desires. Raz is the most liberal on this subject. Scanlon seems to restrict Raz’s view, while Parfit explicitly claims that *no* reasons are provided by desires.¹²² Parfit has, according to Chang, said (in private conversation) that “he might have to qualify his claim that *no* desires can provide reasons”.¹²³ But he added, just like Raz and Scanlon that these desires are peculiar and cannot be the basis for any argument for the view that desires in general can provide us with reasons for action. Chang agrees on this point, and holds that her examples of affective desires do not give us any basis for an argument for a DBR-theory. What she wants is to separate what she calls value based evaluations from these peculiar affective desires of hers. This being so, how is these affective desires to be the Achilles heel of the VBR-theory? All right, they do not fit with the system, but are they any problem for the VBR-view? I will examine these exceptions and see if affective desires can provide us with reasons for actions. I will argue that they do not.

¹¹⁹ Chang 2004: 58

¹²⁰ So how these “affective desires” are to be a “Trojan horse” is hard to understand.

¹²¹ Chang 2004: 62

¹²² Chang refers to Raz, J. 1999, chapter 3: “Incommensurability and agency” (Oxford University Press), Oxford, pp. 46-66; Scanlon, T.M. 2000, *What we owe to each other* (The Belknap press of Harvard University press) Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, Ch. 1; Parfit, D. 2001, “Rationality and reasons” in D. Egonsson (et. al.) (eds.): *Exploring practical philosophy* (Ashgate), pp. 17-39.

¹²³ Chang 2004: 76

7.2 Raz's exceptions from the VBR-theory

Joseph Raz says that there might be some special peculiar situations when “we refer to what we want as we do to reasons”.¹²⁴ These actions are not based on the “balance of reasons”, as Raz's rational actions are. Although this is not a serious threat to Raz's theories, there are some difficulties here. After having argued that no reasons are provided by desires, Raz comes with this strange passage:

There remains the simple point that if of two acceptable options one wants one thing and does the other, one is acting irrationally. If when offered a pear and a banana, I have a reason to take one and it does not matter which one, then if I want the banana but take the pear, I have acted irrationally. Moreover, in situations of this kind just described, one can explain and justify taking the banana by pointing out that one wanted the banana, and not the pear. In such contexts we refer to what we want as we do to reasons. Here they function as reasons. In these circumstances, wants are reasons, though in being limited to this case they are very peculiar reasons.¹²⁵

Raz is offered a pear and a banana, and the pear and the banana are evenly matched; he has no reason to prefer one of them to the other. Raz says that in this sort of situations, when he has two evenly matched options, he is just picking one of them for no particular good reason. But there seems to be a reason why he decides to pick one of them. I think Raz's point is that there are no good reasons, presented as “valuable aspects of the world” that provides him with a good reason to pick either the pear or the banana.

It is not given that these sort of peculiar reasons that Raz has for choosing the banana are equivalent with Chang's affective desires, i.e. desires in the sense of “feeling like it”. But, let us assume that they are like this. Raz may “feel like” having the banana, and if so, then he does have a favouring reason to pick the banana instead of the pear.

There are two important terms in the quote from Raz Chang does not seem to consider. Raz says that there are two *acceptable* options in this situation. Holding that both options are acceptable, implies that they are considered. The object of the actions, what may be relevantly good about each of them is considered. Further, Raz also says that it does not *matter* which one you choose to pick. That it does not matter involves, it seems, that the end of both actions are evenly matched. Therefore, one does not have any favouring reason to prefer the banana over the pear. I think it is at this point Chang's argument is interesting. Suppose that Raz gets an affective desire to take the banana, he just feels like having the banana, and it is because of

¹²⁴ See “Incommensurability and agency” in Raz 1999: 46-66, especially at 62, see also “Explaining Normativity - On Rationality and Justification of Reason” in Raz 1999: 73 and “The truth of Particularism” in Raz 1999: 242

¹²⁵ Raz 1999: 62

this affective desire that he now believes that he has a reason to prefer and thereby choose the banana. If so, he seems to refer to wants as he does to reasons.¹²⁶

I think this is a mistake. In Raz's example it is presupposed that both options are acceptable. If he gets an affective desire to choose the banana, then he gets a feeling that it would be nice to eat the banana. When he is considering his options it comes to his mind that a banana would please his mouth. This may be a "just feel like it" desire: It is a desire that comes through independently of his believing that he has a good reason to take the banana. The affective desire can then seem to be what provides Raz's reason to want the banana. But, does it matter? He has already "accepted" the end of his choice, and this "acceptation" is certainly not provided by this affective desire. Both options are acceptable, both options will probably end with something good it is worthwhile to achieve. And the good about this act is not provided by the affective desire. Therefore, it is not a reason to believe that some good reasons for action are provided by desires on Raz's view.

7.3 Scanlon's exceptions from the VBR-theory

Scanlon wants a new computer for no reason.¹²⁷ By this he means that he cannot find any good reason for wanting a new computer. His computer is perfectly fine, he does not need any more RAM or memory or something like that. The only reasons which he can come up with are reasons like: The computer would look nice on his desk and it will impress his friends and so on. Scanlon does not seem to value these kinds of reasons, but they are still reasons, in the sense that it is possible to act upon them. Still, I cannot find the peculiar exceptions from the VBR-view that Chang points to, in Scanlon's text.

Scanlon admits that he sometimes is "beset by a desire in the directed-attention sense".¹²⁸ He is beset by these desires for no reason; this means that he is beset by these desires without any reasons which he believes there is a good reason to act upon. Scanlon refers to Warren Quinn's example where he is imagining having a strange desire to turn on any radio he sees to be turned off.¹²⁹ Scanlon accepts Quinn's point that such desires cannot, as they stand, be

¹²⁶ I.e. Raz refers to wants as he does to reasons on his theory of reasons (cf. section 4.1). A definition of Raz's theory of reasons is to be found in Raz 1999: 22-3, footnote 4.

¹²⁷ Scanlon 2000, "What we owe to each other"; p. 41-49

¹²⁸ Scanlon 2000: 43

¹²⁹ Quinn 1993c, "Putting rationality in its place", pp. 236-55

rationalized. Scanlon says literally that he does not want any exceptions from the VBR-theory of practical reasons. Still, he admits that he sometimes has desires in the directed-attention sense, but that does not mean that he has a good reason because of these desires. Scanlon says: “It is quite generally that my reason for doing something is almost never “that it will fulfil my desire””.¹³⁰ Sometimes we do have a reason to fulfil our desires, but he holds that when “we have a desire in the directed-attention sense, then we do have a desire which we have a reason to fulfil, but we do not have this reason because of our desire”.¹³¹

We do sometimes have a desire which we have a reason to fulfil. But we do not have a reason to fulfil our desire *because* we have this desire. Again, the object of the desire is “accepted”. We want to achieve the object of the desire; this is the reason why we decide to act upon it. If this is what follows from Scanlon’s view, then his view on desires in “the directed attended sense” is in no way equivalent with Chang’s “affective desires”. So, there is no reason to believe that Scanlon’s theory of desires in the “directed attention sense” is an Achilles heel for the VBR-theory. And it is certainly not a Trojan horse.

7.4 Why Parfit does not need to qualify his claim

I have already said that Parfit, according to Chang, has said that he might have to qualify his claim. I will not speculate in why he said that, I will rather specify his view and argue that there is no ground for claiming that Parfit should moderate or qualify his claim that *no* reasons are provided by desires.

I have argued against internalism in a sort of Aristotelian way. I do also have a kind of Aristotelian reading of Parfit’s theory. Remember Parfit’s definition of reasons on the VBR-view and his definition of what it is like to be substantively rational (cf. section 5) and compare them with this quote from Aristotle:

If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good.¹³²

¹³⁰ Scanlon 2000: 44

¹³¹ Scanlon 2000: 44

¹³² Aristotle, 1989, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I Chapter 2, 1094, 20 W.D. Ross and J. O. Urmson (trans.) in Ackrill, J.L. (ed.) 1989, *A new Aristotle reader* 4th edition (Princeton university press), p. 363

The good is what motivates us to act. I will not examine Aristotle's moral psychology in this essay. I am only saying that if we accept Aristotle's view on practical reason and desires, as I am demonstrating that it seems reasonable to claim that Parfit does, then there is no reason to moderate or qualify the view that no reasons are *provided* by desires.

Furthermore Parfit's argues:

Since our reason for acting is the same as our reason for having the desire on which we act, this desire is not itself part of this reason. And we would have this reason, even if we did not have this desire.¹³³

Compare this claim with Aristotle's:

Both of these, therefore, can produce movement [of the body, i.e. action. My remark] in respect of place, intellect and desire, but intellect which reasons for the sake of something and is practical; and it differs from the contemplative intellect in respect of the end. Every desire too is for the sake of something; for the object of desire is the starting point for the practical intellect, and the final step is the starting point of action.¹³⁴

Parfit is of course aware of this similarity. It is the object of our desires that we are considering when wondering whether we shall act upon our desires or not. If we do decide to act upon a desire, the good reason we have for doing so is not provided by us having the desire. Holding this view, there is no reason for Parfit to qualify his claim. Scanlon also seem to hold this view:

In all this cases [where desires seem to provide our reasons, but do not], however, the reasons are provided by some further enjoyment. Present desire in the directed-attention sense may be an indicator of this enjoyment, but the presence of this state does not, in itself, provide an additional reason for action in the way in which desires are supposed to provide reason to bring about their fulfilment.¹³⁵

It is clear then, there is no reason to claim that the leading theorist on the VBR-theory Chang refers to, need to hold that there are particular peculiar exceptions from the view that no reasons are provided by desires.

¹³³ Parfit 2001, "Rationality and reasons", p. 19

¹³⁴ Aristotle: *De anima* Book III, chapter 10, 433a9-16

¹³⁵ Scanlon 2000: 45

7.5 Quinn and whims

Warren Quinn argues that even actions acted upon whims can be rationalized on the VBR-view.¹³⁶ These whims seem to be more or less the same feelings as Chang's affective desires. If one for example suddenly gets a desire to drink a can of paint, for using Davidson's example, as Quinn does, then it could be rational to have this seemingly irrational whim. Quinn says, plausibly in my opinion, that children may seem to perform irrational acts sometimes, they empty drawers, they eat dirt, they climb under parked cars etc. But these acts may be rational things to do. Children need to explore the world, they need to try things out. Children's curiosity is a very important capacity that children have as well as their remarkable ability to try out different actions they wonder what it would be like to do. Only by committing these acts they can become well experienced, perhaps even well brought up, adults. Adults may sometimes act in the same way, Quinn argues, no one has not tried to do everything. I think Quinn has a point. I do not know what paint tastes like, but I have been told that it does not taste as good as it might look, and I have also been told that it is dangerous to drink paint. Therefore, I will not drink it. As a curious human being, however, I might be tempted to taste it anyway, just to feel what it is like to drink paint. Examples like this where our curiosity overrules our cognitive better judgements does not provide us with any argument for desire-based reasons. On the contrary: There may be that we sometimes do follow our seemingly irrational curiosity on purpose, because we believe that we might learn something by doing this thing. Learning something new is something good that we want to achieve by doing a certain action acted upon a seemingly irrational whim.

We can conclude that even if we do have affective desires, it is not rational to act upon them, without having a reason to do so. This does not entail that we sometimes do not have whims, urges or "affective desires" which influences the actions we do perform. We do sometimes have desires that we have a reason to fulfil. But, as Parfit says, we would have this reason even if we did not have this desire. On the other hand, it is strange to say that there might be a good reason for someone to take a cartwheel, if this person does not have any desire to take a cartwheel. In these cases, it might seem that we have a reason to take a cartwheel because we have a desire; otherwise we would not come to think about taking a cartwheel. But the reason why one decides to act upon one's desire to take a cartwheel is still not provided by this very desire. It could be that we wonder what it would be like to take a cartwheel or we believe it

¹³⁶ Quinn 1993c, "Putting rationality in its place"

will be fun perhaps. Either of these things can be a good reason to take a cartwheel, these good reasons are not provided by our affective desire or whim to take a cartwheel.

8. Substantively and procedural rationality

In this part I will present Parfit's argumentation for the externalist theory on rationality and against the internalist theory of rationality. I will also present two objections by Raz and Dancy to Parfit's presentation of this discussion and argue that they are both mistaken.

8.1 Raz's objection to Parfit's argumentation

Joseph Raz accuses Parfit for saying that there are two concepts of rationality.¹³⁷ That is, "substantively" and "procedural" rationality. Raz argues that if we are to hold that we cannot have a desire except for a reason, then this sort of distinction between different concepts of rationality disappears. Indeed, Raz admits that it is unclear what Parfit's view on this subject is, in the text Raz's quotes. In my opinion there is no doubt what Parfit's view on rationality is. I think Raz has overlooked an important part of Parfit's text. Anyway this discussion is constructive for my purpose of this essay. I will argue that there is a plausible solution to this dispute. This is what Raz says:

Parfit sets the distinction thus: 'To be substantively rational, we must care about certain things, such as our own well-being.' 'To be procedural rational, we must deliberate in certain ways, but we are not required to have any particular desires or aims, such as our own well-being'. What could he mean? (...) He seems to think that there are two different notions of rationality, each designating a different capacity.¹³⁸

This is not what Parfit is saying, as we shall see, is Parfit's aim to explain the externalist view on rationality and the internalist theory on rationality. As I understand it, is Raz's objection concerned whether Parfit is using his definition of procedural rationality as a claim the internalist would agree with, or as a claim his VBR-theory holds. Parfit does not explicitly

¹³⁷ Raz, J. 1999. "Explaining Normativity – On Rationality and Justification of Reason" in *Engaging reason – On the theory of value and action* (Oxford University Press), Oxford, p. 72-5

¹³⁸ Raz 1999: 72-3. The text by Parfit is quoted from Parfit 1997: 101

say he denies procedural rationality in the text Raz quotes. On the other hand, he does not hold that we are procedural rational in the way Raz accuses him to do. What Parfit's says about procedural rationality in "Reasons and motivation" is not a problem for his argumentation. I believe Raz and Parfit actually agree on this point. As Raz says, "Our power of reasoning in and of itself does not establish any degree of rationality".¹³⁹ I think this is as it should be. If rationality consists in responding *appropriately* to reasons, as Raz says, then we are rational when we are responding appropriately to reasons, whatever way we deliberated.¹⁴⁰ Raz's definition of rationality is more or less the same as Parfit's. Parfit says that we are *substantively* rational "when we care about certain things, such as our own well-being". This seems to be two definitions of the same concept of rationality. Sorting out this agreement I think we will come up with a plausible theory of what it is like to be rational.

I think Raz has misunderstood or overlooked an important part of Parfit's text. If we look closer on what Parfit says before and after the text Raz quotes, we will see that Parfit's definition of "procedural rationality" is a definition of the internalist view on rationality.

Internalists hold a different view [than the externalists, my remark]. On their view, more fully stated, for it to be true that

(R) we have a reason to do something

It must be true that

(M) if we knew the relevant facts, and deliberated in a way that was procedural rational, we would be motivated to do this thing

To be procedural rational, we must deliberate in certain ways, but we are not required to have any particular desires or aims, such as concern about our own well-being. If Internalists allowed such further requirements, then, as Williams writes, "there would be no significant difference between the internalist and externalist accounts", since Internalism would allow "anything the externalist could want".¹⁴¹

This means that the definition of procedural rationality designates Williams's position. "Deliberate in a certain way" is meant to designate Williams's "sound deliberation". The second part of that sentence, "but we are not required to have any particular desires or aims, such as concern about our own well-being", is a requirement on rationality that the VBR-theorists holds. When our concern about our own (and other person's) well-being is what

¹³⁹ Raz 1999: 73

¹⁴⁰ See Raz 1999, especially chapter 3, 4 and 5.

¹⁴¹ Parfit 1997: 101-2. The quote from Williams is taken from Williams: "Internal reason and the obscurity of blame" In *Making sense of humanity* 1st edition 1995: 36

motivates us to act, we are acting *substantively* rational. This is a requirement the internalists cannot accept, as Williams explicitly says.¹⁴² The view, that there are no requirements on deliberation, but that it is required that we care about our own well-being, is an externalist claim that Parfit holds. And I believe Raz does too. The most important in this discussion though, are Raz's and Parfit's arguments against the view that rationality consists in deliberate in certain ways.

Parfit defines the externalist theory of rationality in these words:

(R) we have a reason to do something

That entails that

(E) if we knew the relevant facts, and were fully *substantively* rational, we would be motivated to do this thing¹⁴³

This is what Parfit holds, he does not hold that we have or need a capacity to be procedural rational.

8.2 Dancy's objection to Parfit's argumentation

Jonathan Dancy is questioning Parfit's argumentation. It seems to me that he confuses Parfit's point; Dancy says:

Note that Parfit (1997, p. 100) defines internalism disjunctively. According to him, it is the claim that 'for it to be true that (R) we have a reason to do something, it must be true that either (D) doing this thing might help to fulfil one of our present intrinsic desires, or (M) if we knew the relevant facts, and deliberated rationally, we would be motivated to do this thing'. Parfit's disjunctive version is untrue to the position Williams originally presented.¹⁴⁴

Yes, this would have been untrue to Williams's position, if this is what Parfit were saying.

But it is not. This is what Parfit says:

¹⁴² This will be elaborated below. See also Williams, B. 1987, *Ethics and the limits of philosophy* 2nd edition Fontana (Press/Collins), London, especially chapter 3

¹⁴³ Parfit 1997: 101

¹⁴⁴ Dancy 2004b: 16 footnote 4.

Following Williams¹⁴⁵ we can distinguish two kinds of theory. According to

Internalism about reasons: All normative reasons are in this sense internal: for it to be true that

(R) we have a reason to do something,

it must be true that either

(D) doing this thing might help to fulfil one of our present intrinsic desires,

or

(M) if we knew the relevant facts, and deliberated rationally, we would be motivated to do this thing.¹⁴⁶

To my knowledge, Parfit's presentation is correct. (D) refers to the reductive internalist view and (M) refers to Williams's non-reductive internalist view. Parfit elaborates his point thus:

Many Internalists believe that, if either (D) or (M) is true, that is not only necessary but also sufficient for the having of a reason. Though my remarks will often apply to this simple view, I shall not say when that is so. Similarly, though (D) could be true while (M) is false, and vice versa. I shall here, like Williams, set (D) aside.¹⁴⁷

Setting (D) aside is what Williams does when he refuses (or finds unattractive) the sub-Humean model.¹⁴⁸ Williams presents four new criteria for internalism for, in his own words, formulating a "more adequate view".¹⁴⁹ And it is this "more adequate view" Parfit summarises in (M).

I presented Parfit's argument above where he argued that internalism cannot explain or recognize the reasons for intrinsic object-given desires, while the VBR-theory certainly can (cf. section 5.2, pp. 43-5). Williams seems to be aware of this problem when he sets (D) aside. But Parfit has shown that there is a problem to explain object-given intrinsic desires, even on Williams's non-reductive view. Can't we have intrinsic desires according to Williams's theory? That sounds implausible. I argued above that on the VBR-theory we do have desires,

¹⁴⁵ Parfit refers to Williams "Internal and external reasons" 1982 edition and "Internal reasons and the obscurity of blame" 1995 edition.

¹⁴⁶ Parfit 1997, "Reason and Motivation", p. 100

¹⁴⁷ Parfit 1997: 100

¹⁴⁸ Williams 1981, "Internal and External Reasons", p. 101-2; cf. Section 2.1 in this essay.

¹⁴⁹ Williams 1981: 101

perhaps even affective desires, and we do have reason to act upon these desires when we are acting rationally upon them. I doubt internalism can explain this sort of actions. Williams do reject the sub-Humean model because it is implausible. But is Williams's version of internalism more plausible? Yes, in a way, because Williams's version rejects the reductive sub-Humean model. According to Williams, do we, of course, have desires, but we have no reason to have desires on his view. Some desires can be provided by other desires, but intrinsic object-given desires cannot be provided by other desires. Therefore, it seems that Williams must either (1) Deny that we have intrinsic object-given desires. (2) Accept the reductive version of internalism or (3) accept a VBR-theory. (1) is implausible. We do have intrinsic object-given reasons, as I argued in section 7) (2) is according to Williams implausible and (3) he will not accept, because he will not accept the VBR-theory's requirement of being substantively rational:

If we were allowed to adjust the agent's prudential and moral assumptions to some assumed normative standard, then obviously there would be no significant difference between the internalist and the externalist accounts. We could have incorporated into the notion of a 'sound deliberation' anything the externalist could want¹⁵⁰

I cannot see any reason for not giving up the notion of "sound deliberation". I have elaborated my understanding of Parfit's presentation of his discussion of reasons.¹⁵¹ It seems to me that both Raz and Dancy has overlooked central issues in Parfit's discussion. Raz has not seen that Parfit is formulating the externalist- and the internalist theories on rationality. Parfit is not claiming that there are "two different notions of rationality, each designating a different capacity" as Raz says.¹⁵² Dancy seems to have overlooked the importance of the term "intrinsic" on (D).

Raz claims that Parfit does not elaborate what he means by his presentation of "two notions of rationality".¹⁵³ This is, as I have argued above, certainly not the case. Parfit elaborates the externalist position thus:

According externalists are (E) merely a consequence of (R). What gives us reasons for acting are not facts about our motivation, but facts about our own or other people's well-being¹⁵⁴ (cf. p. 61).

¹⁵⁰ Williams 2000, "Internal reasons and the obscurity of blame", p. 36

¹⁵¹ In Parfit 1997: 100-1

¹⁵² Raz 1999: 73

¹⁵³ Raz 1999: 72

¹⁵⁴ Parfit 1997: 102

We have seen that Williams hold that (R) is true *because* (M) is true (cf. p. 62-3). This is the core idea in Williams's internalism. Do we have any reason to accept this view? In section 9 I will argue that we do not.

It seems clear to me that Williams's arguments do not affect the externalist theory of good reasons that we do rationally act upon, since reasons are provided by values and not our motivational states. Furthermore, since reasons are based on values, we do have a reason to inform each other about good external reasons. We may say to Owen Wingrave that there might be a reason for him to join the army, if there is something good about him doing so. Owen does not value a military career: Therefore he does not desire to join the army. The reason why Owen does not value a military career is not provided by his desire to not join the army. Moreover; we may say to the mean man that there is a reason for him to stop beating his wife. Of course we can say that. When we are saying that there is a good reason for him to act otherwise, we are not referring to any current motivation in this man's mind. It is not his motivations we are referring to, it is the value of not beating one's wife we are referring to, i.e. a value-based reason.

There is an external reason for the mean man to act otherwise. This claim is not proven to be false by Williams's arguments. It is not claimed that the fact that there is a good thing to not beat one's wife can explain an action all *by itself* (cf. the second premise in the first argument against externalism). This fact, nevertheless, provides the mean man with a good reason to act otherwise, *if he is substantively rational*.¹⁵⁵ If he is not, if he is a hard case, then the externalists do agree with Williams that we cannot say that the mean man *has* a reason to act otherwise. It does not follow from this latter claim, that there cannot be a good reason for the mean man to act otherwise.

The mean man can of course not come to believe that there is a reason for him to treat his wife better by a "sound deliberative route" from his present S. The externalists do not hold that there is needed any "sound deliberative route" from one's S to come to see that there is a reason for one to do something. If one is substantively rational or properly brought up, one may come to see that there is a good reason to act otherwise.

¹⁵⁵ Another versions of externalist theories on rationality is to found in Bittner, R. 2001, *Doing things for reasons* (Oxford University Press), Oxford; Gert, J. 2004, *Brute rationality - Normativity and human action* (Cambridge University Press), Cambridge, Broome, J. 2005

9. Does Parfit succeed in refusing internalism?

In “What we could rationally will”¹⁵⁶ Parfit is discussing what may be rational to do in different difficult situations. He has an example about a difficult situation that appears because of an earthquake.¹⁵⁷ In this example we are forced to choose between saving a person “A’s” leg and a person “Black’s” life.¹⁵⁸

Let us assume that A’s practical reasons are to be described on Williams’s internalist theory. If A desires that we sacrifice his leg in order to save Black’s life, then A, according to the internalist view, is motivated to desire that we shall sacrifice his leg. We may ask why A desires that we shall sacrifice his leg. On the internalist view, A will have no good reason to desire that we shall decide to sacrifice his leg, in order to save Black’s life. As Parfit says:

On desire-based theories, we cannot have reasons to care about anything for its own sake. All reasons to have some desire must be provided by some desire. And this must be some *other* desire. We can have a reason to want some thing to happen if its happening would have effects that we want. But we cannot have any reason to have any intrinsic desire, or ultimate aim. We cannot have such reasons, for example, to want ourselves or others not to suffer or die.¹⁵⁹

If A says that he believes that there is a reason for him to desire to sacrifice his own leg, he will have to point to something that he believes he will achieve by doing this thing. If A do have a goal or an end he believes he will achieve by doing this thing, there must be a reason why he has this goal. A may be capable of coming to see that there is a reason for him to sacrifice his own leg in order to save Black’s life. Is his reason for desiring that we shall sacrifice his leg provided by his *having a desire* for us to do so? I find this position very unattractive. *What* is wrong with claiming that A may “create” a desire for us to sacrifice his leg in order to save Black’s life, because he believes that there is a good reason for him to do so? I would like to stress my point by presenting this remarkable quote from Mark Platts:

The crucial premises in this argument [for a desire-based theory of reasons] is the claim that any full specification of a reason for an action, if it is to be a reason for the potential agent for action, must make reference to that agent’s desires. (...) The premises can, of course, be held true by simply claiming that,

¹⁵⁶ Parfit, D. 2002, “What we could rationally will” Tanner Lectures On Human Values 2002

¹⁵⁷ Parfit 2002: 290

¹⁵⁸ I have added “A” to this example.

¹⁵⁹ Parfit 2002: 311

when acting because we think something desirable, we do indeed desire it. But this is either phenomenological false, there being nothing in our inner life corresponding to the posited desire, or utterly vacuous, neither content nor motivation being given to the positing of the desire. Nothing but muddle (and boredom) comes from treating desire as a mental catch-all.¹⁶⁰

The VBR-theory explains what is happening to *A* in this situation. If *A* want the end of the action, namely our saving Black's life rather than his leg, then he may rational consent to be treated as a mean to this end. If *A* does not assent to our decision, there seems to be two possibilities. *A* could be a "hard case", lacking appropriate motivation. To me it seems more likely that *A* probably understands our decision, but because it is very hard to voluntarily sacrifice one's own leg, he is not capable to give assent to our decision. According to the VBR-view, will we still have a reason to tell *A* that there is a good reason for him to accept our decision, even if he does not understand what this reason is, or is not capable to voluntarily give assent to it. If *A* consents to our sacrificing his leg, then he is substantively rational. If he is substantively rational, then he will care about Black's well-being. Moreover, he will have a reason to do so. It is indeed possible that *A* assents to our decision to sacrifice his leg in order to save Black's leg. If the internalists are right and *A* is a hard case, then he will have no reason to care about Black's well-being. Moreover, *A* may, on this view, be procedural rational and still there will not be true that he has a reason to care about Black's well-being.

I think this is a good reason to reject internalism of practical reasons. What is wrong with claiming that there might be a good reason for *A* to consent to our decision to sacrifice his leg in order to save Black's life, and that there might be true that there is a good reason for him to do so, even if he is not motivated to do this thing?

¹⁶⁰ Platts, M. 1980, "Moral Reality" in Platts 1980, *Ways of meaning, an introduction to Philosophy of Language* (Routledge and Kegan Paul), London, Boston and Henley, pp. 243-263, at p. 256

10. Conclusion

To repeat; do we have any reason at all to accept internalism of practical reasons? As McDowell puts it:

Do we actually have any reason to accept the eightieth-century philosophy of mind, apart from a prior conviction of the truth of non-cognitivism?¹⁶¹

In my opinion we do not have any reason to accept this view. I have argued that Williams's view is more plausible than the reductive view I think McDowell is referring to in the quotation above. Still, I cannot see any reason to believe that the VBR-view on reasons is at all contested by Williams's arguments against externalism. I have argued in this essay that it is possible that there might be a reason for an agent to ϕ , independently of this person's current motivations. This entails that not all reasons are provided by our motivational states. If this is true, as I believe we can insist that it is, then Williams's arguments against externalism fails. I have also argued that *no* reasons are provided by our motivational states. If this latter bolder claim is true, then internalism is false.

I would like to quote Parfit once more to clarify why I believe his argumentation against Williams is convincing.

According to value-based theories: Some aims really are worth to achieving. There are facts about these aims which give us reasons to want to achieve them. This claim is, I believe, no less plausible. If jumping from a burning building is my only way to save my life [which it will be substantively rational to do], desire-based theories agree that I have a reason to jump. If that fact can give me such a reason, why can't facts about my life give me reasons to want to live? And if one of two ordeals would be more painful, why can't that give me a reason to prefer the other? It is amazing that such theories still need defending.¹⁶²

In this essay I have presented Williams's internalist theory of practical reasons and rationality and his arguments against the externalist theory. I have concluded that Parfit does have a point in rejecting Williams's theory. There are problems with the internalist view, such as the seemingly absence of object-given intrinsic desires. In my opinion it is more important to ask the question why it is false, or wrong to claim that there might be a reason for someone

¹⁶¹ McDowell, J.1998. "Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following" In *Mind, Value and Reality* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press), pp.198-218, at 200

¹⁶² Parfit 2001: 38

to act without referring a member of this person's S. If reasons are based on values, then we can say these things without "bluffing" or coming with "optimistic internal reasons-statements". On the VBR-theory we do have reasons to care about our own and other people's well-being. Holding this view, a view which Williams, I have argued, did not succeed in rejecting, we do have a reason to tell the mean man that there would be better if he acted otherwise. Williams did prove that value-based external reasons are impossible; therefore do we not have any reason to doubt, as a result of Williams's arguments, that there are good external reasons for acting.

I hope my presentation of Williams in this essay have been true to his position. I have tried to present Williams's view and arguments as true to his texts as best as I can and I do agree with Warren Quinn when he says:

Even if Williams is wrong in the way I allege, we clearly remain in great debt for the philosophical power and subtlety he brings to these fascinating questions.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Quinn, W. 1993a, "Reflections and the loss of moral knowledge: Williams on objectivity" In Quinn, Warren 1993, *Morality and action* (Cambridge University Press) Cambridge, pp. 134-148, at p. 148

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